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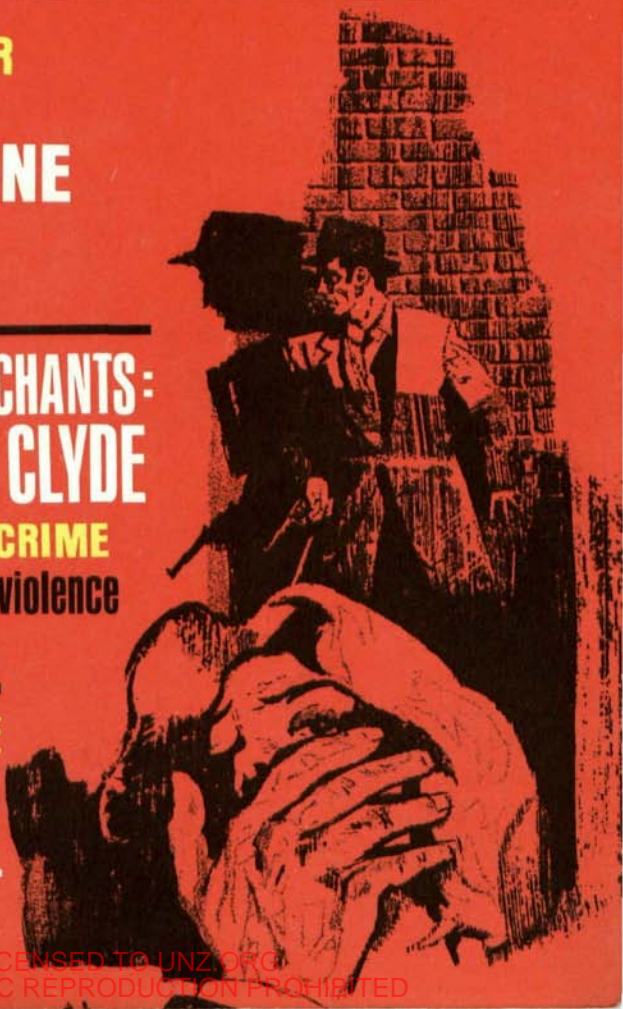
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MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

MARCH, 1968

VOL. 22, NO. 4

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

KEY TO A KILLER

by **BRETT HALLIDAY**

Not wisely and too long had she shared a vice king's love. Now she was dead, and Mike Shayne undertook what could be his toughest assignment of all. Somehow, alone, he must walk into a deathtrap baited for his life, bring out a killer—and yet manage to walk away alive!

..... 2 to 50

NEW TRUE CRIME FEATURE

THE DEATH MERCHANTS: BONNIE and CLYDE

DAVID MAZROFF 90

NEW EXCITING NOVELET

ABSOLUTELY, MR. MARKO—POSITIVELY, MR. SMITH

EDWARD Y. BREESE 72

LEO MARGULIES

Publisher

CYLVIA KLEINMAN

Editorial Director

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Associate Editor

NEW THRILLING STORIES

REPAYMENT

NANCY MacROBERTS 51

MURDER FROM INSIDE

MICHAEL COLLINS 56

ONE MURDER, COMING UPI

CARROLL MAYERS 118

MR. WONG MEETS A LOVELY SPY

DAN ROSS 125

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Complete in this issue

THE NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL



KEY TO A KILLER

Terror was king, and Murder was his henchman, as Mike Shayne went alone into a gangland trap to find a girl who had learned the price of a vice lord's love—too late!

by **BRETT HALLIDAY**

MICHAEL SHAYNE arrived at his Flagler Street office at 8:30 on a Thursday morning in June. It was hot in Miami. The redhead felt like overcooked hamburger from only the short walk from the parking garage to his building. His grey eyes glared balefully at his pert secretary, Lucy Hamilton.

"You must have witch blood, Angel," Shayne growled.

Lucy Hamilton looked as crisp as spring lettuce with the dew still on it. Her brown eyes were equally crisp, and showed no sympathy for the sweating Shayne.

"You are overweight, Michael," Lucy said. "Besides, heat is a matter of will power. Make up your

mind that it is not hot and you won't feel it."

"I'd rather go to Alaska," Shayne said drily.

"Not with three cases on hand you won't, Michael Shayne," Lucy said smiling. "Mr. Rumford is already waiting for you."

Shayne groaned inwardly. Mr. James Rumford had been losing rejected, but still valuable, pieces from his toy factory for a month. For three weeks Shayne had been staking out the place with no results. Until last night. Now he had results, and he did not like what he had.

"Get his bill ready, Angel," Shayne said. "You'll probably have

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to block the door to give it to him."

With that the detective strode on into his office. He hung his panama on the hatrack, went to his desk, sat, and only then did he look at James Rumford. The toy manufacturer was an irascible little man who now glared at Mike Shayne.

"Well?" Rumford said. "Three weeks should be enough. You were highly recommended for efficiency."

"Three weeks was enough," Shayne said.

Rumford leaned forward.

"You've found the thief?"

"Yes," Shayne said. "I'm not sure you'll like it."

Rumford was eager. "Of course I'll like it. I hate thieves. Who is it?"

"A man who's using the rejects to run a little business of his own on the side. He's selling to your own customers."

Rumford turned purple. "My own customers!"

"Underselling on slight flaws," Shayne said. "It's an old racket."

Rumford's purple deepened toward black. "Who! I'll put him in jail so fast his head'll spin off."

"Maybe," Shayne said. "It's your nephew, Mr. Rumford. It's George Rumford, your assistant production manager."

The little toymaker stared at Shayne. Rumford went from purple to chalk-white. Then the manufacturer turned red. Shayne watched this gamut of color

changes with interest. Rumford was a man with a skin like a chameleon.

"George?" Rumford cried. "I don't believe you! No, you're lying!"

"Why would I lie, Mr. Rumford?" Shayne said mildly.

"A cover-up! You're going to work with the real thief!"

Shayne tugged deliberately on his left earlobe as he let his grey eyes bore into the man. "For that little idea I should remove your fat head from between your stupid ears. But I'll let it go. I have the full report in this envelope," and he tossed a fat manilla envelope to the toy-maker. "You read it, you judge. My secretary will give you my bill on your way out."

"If you ever think I'm going to pay—"

"You'll pay, Mr. Rumford. Now or later. I've got a very good lawyer. Now get out of my sight."

Rumford did not move. "George? Underselling me to my own customers with my own rejects?"

"Sorry," Shayne said.

Rumford took a deep breath, stood up. "My brother's son. You know, my brother was a bum. Left his widow in a bad hole and I took the boy on to help."

"Life is hard," Shayne said, and softened it. "I'm sorry, Rumford, really. Maybe the boy can straighten out if he gets hit hard enough."

Rumford nodded. Still nodding,

he walked slowly out. Shayne sat back and ran a big hand through his thick red hair. He hoped Rumford could take it. Despite what he had said, the younger Rumford was a bum, a crook, a complete no-good.

Shayne turned to work on his second case. An hour later he was still reading reports, when Lucy Hamilton came in. She carried a small envelope.

"A messenger just left this, Michael," Lucy said.

"Who's it from?"

"It doesn't say, and the messenger didn't know," Lucy said. "He just picked it up at his office."

Shayne nodded and took the envelope. Inside there was a key, a torn half of a hundred-dollar bill, and a typed note: *Hold this for other half of note plus bonus.* And nothing more.

Shayne looked at Lucy. "The messenger said nothing?"

"Nothing, Michael."

"What was the messenger company, Angel?"

"Mercury Winged Service."

Shayne turned the note over. It was unsigned, on a small piece of common bond paper. Shayne looked at the bill. It was genuine. Lastly he looked at the key. It was large, flat and pale steel.

"What would you say it opens, Angel?" Shayne asked.

"Safety deposit box," Lucy said promptly.

Shayne nodded. "I'd say the

same. No way of identifying what bank, though. There must be five thousand in Miami."

"And the key doesn't have to be for a Miami bank."

"How true, Angel," Shayne said.

He continued to study the key and torn bill after Lucy had gone back to the outer office. It was clear that whoever had sent it considered that the promised money would make him eager to keep the key safe—and equally clear that the torn bill was to serve as identification, too.

After a time he got up and put the key, note and torn hundred into his safe. Then he clapped his panama on his head and strode out to go to work on his third case. There was no point to trying to locate who had sent the key and bill—the messenger service would not know. The owner would turn up in due time, and meanwhile he put the matter out of his mind.

Shayne was considering his next move in his third current case—the investigation of an accidental death insurance claim—as he walked out of his building and turned left.

A small crowd was gathered around the service entrance to the next building. There was a squad car at the curb.

II

MIKE SHAYNE pushed through the knot of people. A patrolman held the crowd back while a sec-

ond patrolman bent over the fallen form of a boy in a dark grey uniform.

Shayne stepped up to the first patrolman.

"Troubles, Garcia?" Shayne asked.

The patrolman glanced at him, smiled.

"Oh, hello, Mr. Shayne. Yeah, looks like a mugging. Broad daylight, too."

"Who is he?" Shayne asked.

"Some messenger kid."

The second patrolman looked up from the unconscious boy.

"Stripped clean, but his money's still on him," the second patrolman said. "His sack of deliveries is gone, and his route book."

"What service?" Shayne asked sharply.

"Oh, hello, Mr. Shayne," the second officer said. "What service? Mercury Winged Service, it says on his uniform."

The ambulance arrived, and Lieutenant Maddox from Robbery. The doctor bent over the prostrate boy and Maddox joined the two patrolmen. After a moment, Maddox came to Shayne.

"You know anything about this, Mike?" Maddox said.

"Only what I see," Shayne said. "What's the story?"

"You see it. Kid's still out. Witnesses say they didn't see a thing until the kid came out the service entrance and fell on his face. It must have happened inside the

door. Funny they'd leave the money."

"No, it isn't," Shayne said. "It wasn't small-time ordinary muggers. Not in broad daylight on Flagler Street. They must have jumped the kid and dragged him inside. Messengers don't use the service entrance."

The doctor stood up. "Might have a skull fracture. He's out good. Bruises on face and stomach, too. I'd say he was worked over by professionals, Maddox."

"When can he talk?" Maddox asked.

The doctor looked down. "Hard to say. Maybe never. I'll tell you better after we get him to the hospital. Say two days at least, if he doesn't die. Boys."

The doctor motioned to his ambulance men who picked up the unconscious boy and laid him on a stretcher. They carried him off while Lieutenant Maddox frowned.

"If he dies we'll probably never know who slugged him," the lieutenant said.

Patrolman Garcia came up to Maddox with a small, grey old lady.

"This lady says she saw something, Lieutenant," Garcia said.

"I surely did," the old woman said. "I'm Mrs. Rabat, officer. Mrs. George Rabat. Poor George passed away some years ago. I work in the office of Croker and Jones. They're lawyers. So you see, I come in late

because I only work part time, and—”

“Just tell us what you saw, Mrs. Rabat,” Maddox said.

“Don’t be impatient, young man. I’m coming to that. Anyway, I come in late and I like to walk. George always said walking was good for the health. I was just passing the service entrance there when I saw that boy. Two men stopped him. I didn’t think anything of it, so I just walked on. Then I heard a kind of grunt, or something, and I looked back, and the two men were going into the service entrance with the boy. They were holding him.”

“Two men?” Maddox snapped. “You’re sure?”

“There’s nothing wrong with my eyes, young man,” Mrs. Rabat said huffily.

“Can you describe the two men?”

“Oh, yes!”

Maddox took out his notebook.

“They were both young and kind of dark. They wore dark suits. They seemed to have good teeth,” Mrs. Rabat said.

“How tall were they? Any marks or scars? Anything special you can remember about them?”

“Oh, average height. About your size, or maybe the size of that red-headed man there. Just young men. They smiled.”

Maddox looked at Shayne. Maddox was about five-foot-ten; Shayne was over six feet and much bigger.



Maddox sighed and put away his notebook.

“Thank you, Mrs. Rabat. You’re sure there were two of them?”

“Oh yes,” the woman said definitely. “There may have been another man in the car, though. I’m not sure.”

“Car?”

“Yes, didn’t I mention that? The two men got out of a car that parked at the curb. I noticed because I don’t think it’s really legal. I mean to park there.”

“What kind of car?”

“Oh, one of those small ones, you know.”

“Color?”

“Black, or maybe green.”

“Did you notice the license?” Maddox said.

“Goodness, no.”

Maddox put his hands in his pockets. “Thank you again, Mrs. Rabat.”

"George always said we had a duty to help the police."

Maddox watched her walk away with her head up proudly. She had done her citizen's duty. Shayne grinned at Maddox.

"Don't say the public isn't ready to help," Shayne said.

Maddox only scowled. Just then another patrolman came up. He carried a large leather pouch like a mailman's bag.

"Found this in a trash can up the street," the patrolman said to Maddox.

Maddox took the bag and looked into it. Shayne looked over his shoulder. There was nothing in the bag except some packages. Shayne reached in and searched around. There were no letters or small envelopes.

"They dumped it," Maddox said, "but I'd guess that he had more in it, and his route book is still missing."

"So they were looking for something special," Shayne pointed out.

"It looks that way," Maddox agreed. "Sure you don't come into this?"

"No," Shayne said, "but I'd check what he was carrying and his route if I were you, Maddox. The company should have a list."

"I know," Maddox sighed. "Just the job for a hot day."

Shayne grinned and walked off. But he did not continue on toward his garage. He went back toward his building, and once he was out

of sight of the police he stopped grinning.

He hurried into his building, up in the elevator, and along the corridor to his office. He approached his office warily. But Lucy Hamilton was at her desk, as crisp as ever and surprised to see him.

"Why, Michael, you couldn't have finished so soon!"

"New job, Angel," Shayne said. He picked up her handbag and held it out to her. "Go to lunch, Angel, and take the day off."

Lucy blinked, and looked at her watch. "It's not even eleven yet. I'm not hungry, Michael."

"Then go to the beach. I mean it, Angel. Out, and fast."

Lucy Hamilton stared at him for a moment, and then stood up, took her bag, and left without another word. Shayne stood at the door until she was safely in the elevator. Then he closed his door, went into his inner office, and looked carefully around.

He took his .45 automatic from his holster and slipped it into a special clip under his desk.

He went to his bookcase, took down a book and opened it. He checked the snub-nosed police special inside the fake book, and replaced the book.

He went to his sink and drew a glass of water. He poured away half of it, took a small vial from his medicine cabinet, and poured the contents into the glass. Then he set the glass casually on the sink.

He took out some folders and placed them open on his desk.

Then he sat down behind his desk.

He looked at his watch. Eleven o'clock.

A cigarette in his lean mouth, he wondered how long he would have to wait.

III

IT WAS 12:30 when he heard the first careful sounds. The outer door opened cautiously.

There was a silence.

Shayne bent over his reports as if totally concentrating. Light footsteps crossed the outer office to the door of his private office. The door opened.

Mike Shayne looked up, startled, and reached cautiously for his top right drawer.

"Like slow, shamus," the man in the doorway said. "Be a statue, real quiet."

Shayne stopped and sat motionless.

The man stepped into the office and closed the door behind him. He was a short, stocky man of about twenty-five. Muscles rippled under a close-fitting charcoal grey suit. His swarthy complexion was in sharp contrast to his immaculate white shirt and conservative grey-and-black figured tie. His fingernails were clean, but there were callouses on the knuckles. He held a gun.

"Up and over to the wall," the gunman said.

Shayne stood and walked to the wall. The gunman opened the top right drawer of the desk and took out the .45 automatic Shayne kept there as his office gun. The swarthy man pocketed the pistol.

"Face the wall. Lean, hands flat," the gunsel said.

Shayne leaned on the wall. Expert hands frisked him.

"Okay. Turn around."

Shayne turned around. The gunman smiled and hit him in the belly with all the force of his left hand. Shayne grunted and doubled over and sat down on the floor. It had been a good punch, but Shayne made it seem better than it was. The gunman looked down at Shayne.

"Not bad, peeper, not bad. You take a decent punch," the muscleman said. "I heard you was tough. I guess maybe you are. I buried them ten times tougher. Remember that."

"Whose side were they on, the ones you buried?" Shayne said from the floor. "Friends or enemies?"

The swarthy man scowled, leaned down, and slashed Shayne across the face with the pistol. Shayne tasted blood. The gunman glared at him.

"Don't be a smart peeper, peeper," the man said. "I don't like smart peepers. In the movies all the peepers make with the funny talk.

Here I make the jokes. Right, peeper?"

"You're a joke all right, big man," Shayne said.

The gunman snarled, and then suddenly straightened up and laughed. He backed off and sat on the edge of Shayne's desk.

"How much you make a year, shamus? Ten grand? Twenty maybe? I hear you're a real big-time shamus. Peanuts, monkey. I pays that for vacation. You work for peanuts like any monkey, monkey."

Shayne got to his feet. "You must get paid by the word, loud-mouth."

The hood nodded. "That's right, monkey. You hit it first shot. I get paid by the word. Only not my word, monkey. *Your* words. You got it?"

"I got it," Shayne said. "Okay if I smoke?"

"Why not?"

Shayne lighted a cigarette. He went around his desk and sat down. The gunman watched him all the way.

"Right," the swarthy hood said. "Now where is it?"

"Where's what?"

The gunman sighed. "The gizmo, the thing that kid messenger brought here."

"What makes you think any messenger left anything here?"

"I got a crystal ball, monkey."

"Then ask the crystal ball where it is," Shayne said.

The gunman stood up from the edge of the desk. "Look, monkey. I ain't been working up a sweat on you for kicks. Now I know you got the thing, and I know I'm gonna get it, see?"

"Who wants it, loud-mouth? Who's got the real muscle to back your play?" Shayne said. "You're a paid hand, loud-mouth."

"A big man wants it, monkey. A real big man. I only work for big men."

"Anyone who hires you can't be so big," Shayne sneered, "and you don't know I have what you want."

"Don't I, monkey?"

"No. There were three of you jumped that messenger. If you knew for sure I had it all three of you'd be here. You're running down the list of deliveries the boy made, and you drew me. You don't know anything. I figure I better talk to the big man."

"You'll talk to me!" the gunsnel snarled.

As he spat out the threat the gunman stepped to Mike Shayne and slashed with the gun. Shayne came out of the chair in a crouch and inside the swing of the gun. With a thin smile on his craggy face Shayne chopped a short left uppercut to the gunman's chin.

The gun missed behind Shayne's head, and his fist connected in the same instant. The hood went over in a melee of legs and arms. Shayne jumped and kicked the pistol out of the man's hand. The gunman

reacted well. Instead of lunging at once for the gun, the swarthy man kicked Shayne's feet out from under him.

Shayne went down. The gunsel crawled wildly for his pistol. Shayne was nearer the sink than his desk now. He reached the sink, whirled with the glass in his hand. The gunman had reached his pistol. The hood grabbed and turned with a vicious smile of hate. Shayne threw the contents of the glass into his face.

"Aaaagggghhh!"

The gunman dropped the gun and clawed at his eyes. Shayne kicked the gun away again. The gunman was tough. Half-blinded by the tear-gas solution Shayne had prepared, he still tried once more for his pistol.

Shayne hit him with a left and right to the stomach. The gunman collapsed in a quivering heap. Then he tried once more and Shayne hit him on the point of the chin.

Breathing hard, Shayne looked down at the gunman. It would take a while to revive the swarthy hood this time. When he had his breath back, Shayne bent down on one knee and searched the unconscious man. He found nothing. No papers, no identification. Nothing but a shoulder holster, six hundred dollars in cash, and a six-inch switchblade knife.

A careful gunman—or a smart and careful boss.



Shayne stood up and went to his telephone. He called Miami Chief of Police Will Gentry. The gruff Chief growled hello.

"I've got a prime tenant for one of your cages," Shayne said.

"How prime? And what charge, Mike?"

"Assault, aggravated assault, a gun charge, attempted burglary, take your choice."

"Anyone I know?"

"That's what I want to find out, Will," Shayne said.

IV

CHIEF WILL GENTRY and Mike Shayne sat in the darkened room and watched through the one-way window. Inside the interrogation room the swarthy gunman sat in a hard chair under a harder light.

and three of the hardest cops took turns asking questions.

"Three hours," Gentry growled to Shayne, "and it's my boys who're looking tired."

"He's tough," Shayne said.

"I've seen him," Gentry said, "somewhere. I can't place him right now. He's not a display gunman. No 'show guard', and no cheap muscle. The kind stays close to the boss and not many people get a look at, including us. But I've seen him."

"He talks big money, and he can take it," Shayne said. "No ident at all on him."

"Any idea what he wanted?"

"Some, Will. Give me some time."

"I don't crowd you, Mike," Gentry said. "When it's time you'll tell me. Anything to do with that messenger? Maddox said you seemed interested."

"Maybe, Will," Shayne said. Until he knew at least something of what it was all about he did not want the police making any official noise.

"Let's go and see if his prints have brought anything yet," Gentry said.

But the check of Gentry's files had yielded nothing on the swarthy man, and the query to Washington had not come back yet. Shayne went out for some dinner.

He had two sidecars with his dinner, and once thought he might also have some unasked company.

A man had stood outside the restaurant and seemed very interested in the displayed menu. A man who could have been the twin of the gunman sweating now up in Gentry's interrogation room. But the man walked on soon after, and was not in sight when Shayne came out.

Gentry had a paper in his hand when Mike Shayne walked back into the Chief's office.

"Jesus Mendez Garcia," Gentry growled. "FBI just came in with it. Six arrests in New Orleans, one short stretch. Three Federal arrests, one-to-five in Atlanta for hijacking interstate. He's twenty-five, a busy boy. Word has it he's medium high in the organization, operating in the New York area."

"What did he say when you told him?"

"He said it was interesting but not him. He wants a lawyer."

"What lawyer?"

"Chadwick," Gentry said.

"Swell," Shayne said. Gray Culpepper Chadwick was the best and most gang-associated lawyer in Miami.

"Chadwick's on his way," Gentry said. "Even with your charge we can't hold Garcia longer than maybe another ten hours."

"Chadwick works for half the racketeers in town," Shayne said. "What about where you knew this Garcia?"

Gentry chewed on the stump of his black cigar. "That's a funny thing, Mike. I know I know Mendy

—that's what they call him: Mendy Garcia. But I can't pin it down yet. He's got no record at all in Miami. I think I've seen him with someone bigger—a shadow hanging around, you know?"

"Yeah," Shayne said, "I know. Only that would mean that he's operating here now and not New York."

"I've got a wire out to New York to see what they know," Gentry said.

Shayne stood up. "Okay, Will. Hold him as long as you can. I'll sign the complaint."

"If Mendy Garcia's mixed up in it, Mike, it's not mah-jong," Gentry said. "You'll let me know when you've got anything."

"I'll let you know, Will."

Shayne left, and stopped to sign the complaint on his way out. When he hit the street he lit a cigarette. Gentry wanted to know when he had anything. So far he didn't even have a crime! Just an envelope with a key and a torn hundred dollar bill; a beaten messenger; and one very tough boy looking for the key. Or was Mendy Garcia looking for the key?

Shayne got into his car and drove slowly toward his office. Garcia had wanted what the messenger had brought—but Garcia had not really known that Shayne had it. Shayne was not at all sure Mendy even knew what the messenger had brought!

In short someone was looking

hard for that key, but maybe did not actually know what he was looking for! It raised some very interesting questions. But no answers.

Shayne looked at his watch. It was not yet five o'clock. Instead of stopping at his office he drove on past for about a mile and stopped in front of an art-supply shop. He parked and went into the shop. A slender woman in a mini-skirt and with hair pulled back and no makeup smiled at him from behind the counter of the shop.

"Can I help you, sir?"

"You can tell Marty I'm here."

Her smile faded only a fraction. "Marty? I'm afraid you must have the wrong establishment, sir. Mr. Manuel DiNotta owns this shop. I assist him. If you need any art supplies, I'm sure I can help you."

"I need a friendly welcome for my money," Shayne said.

Her smile was no longer warm enough to melt an ice cube.

"I'm sorry."

"Look, honey," Shayne said.

"I'm going to stand here with my back turned. I'm not going to leave or do anything else. You go to wherever you go, do whatever you do, and tell Marty it's Mike Shayne."

The arty woman stared. "Shayne the shamus?"

"Your diction is slipping."

"If you're that Shayne, buster, just say it in English."

"I'm that Shayne."

"Show me."

He showed her. She nodded. "Back door, knock three times."

Shayne knocked on the back door three times. A voice from nowhere said, "Mike Shayne? Show me."

Shayne showed the unseen voice. The door clicked. He went through into a narrow corridor. Another door opened like the locks of a canal. Shayne stepped into a smallish room, where four men sat at telephones.

"... two-hundred on Lazy Jay in the Sixth . . . five dollars across the board with Mr. Sam in the . . . two big bills on Mare's Nest's nose . . ."

Shayne walked through the ceaseless chatter and ringing of telephones to the fat man who sat at the last phone.

"Hello, Marty," Shayne said.

"Playing the nags now, Mike?" Marty Bell said.

The bookie was an enormous mountain of a man with three chins and arms like most men's legs.

"The day'll never come," Shayne said.

Marty sighed. "The trouble with you is you don't have the national dream. You don't want something for nothing. How can I get rich that way?"

"I want some information, Marty," Shayne said very softly.

Marty's eyes flickered all around the room. To a few special people in Miami Marty Bell was known as

the man who knew everything that happened in the city. Marty kept it to a few, which was why he was still operating. Shayne was one of the few. And there was a ritual.

"You can't cheat an honest man, that's the truth," Marty said. Then, softly, "Write it down."

Shayne wrote two words on a betting slip: Mendy Garcia.

Marty looked at it. "That's a bad word. Real bad."

"I know. What's his stable, Marty?"

"Down from New York two years ago, when Randy Nova's top boy made a mistake and got sent to Leavenworth. Nova's shadow ever since."

"The gambler?"

"Randy gambles," Marty said. "He's partners with Joe Dann."

"Thanks, Marty."

"Any time for you, Mike. Just don't quote me."

V

THE BLUE GROFFO was one of the biggest clubs in Miami Beach. Mike Shayne parked in the lot that looked like Lower New York Bay in size, and an attendant in a uniform about as gaudy as that of a Syrian field marshal took the car away into some vast distance.

It was early and the club had just opened. Shayne went in past the doorman like any other customer. Inside he turned into the long and elegant bar section. The

bar was already crowded. The restaurant was deserted. Drinkers are more eager than eaters.

"Yes, sir," the barman said.

"S'idecar," Shayne said, "easy on the Cointreau."

The barman served the drink on a paper coaster.

"Where do I find Randy?" Shayne asked.

"Does he want you to find him?"

"I haven't asked him yet."

The barman rubbed the bar with a thick rag. "Then you don't find him. He wants to see you, he'll find you."

"Mendy found me. Mendy sent a message," Shayne said.

"Who's Mendy?"

"I must have the wrong place," Shayne said mildly.

He drank his sidecar and watched the well-heeled drunks. The Blue Grotto was as good a place to kill what time you had as any place. He was on his second sidecar when the swarthy man stepped up behind him.

"Where's Mendy, shamus?"

Shayne turned and contemplated the man. "Who's Mendy?"

"The bar . . ." the man began, then clamped his jaw hard. "You want to play games, Shayne?"

"That's right, only I don't play with the help. Randy want to play?"

"Randy don't play with bums like you."

"Okay," Shayne said and finished his drink. "See you in jail."

He dropped his money on the bar and walked out. He went out into the parking lot and headed toward the attendant's stand that looked like the superstructure of an aircraft carrier. A side door opened in the club.

"Shayne."

The speaker was a tall, lean man with the build of a trim heavy-weight and the face of a movie star. Shayne had met Randy Nova once before. He had liked the racketeer until he had found out what he was. Nova had a lot of charm, but there was muscle under the charm—brain muscle as well as physical muscle.

"Won't you come this way," Nova said.

Shayne followed the tall gambler through the door and up a narrow flight of stairs. The stairs ended in another door, then a small curtained foyer, and then the second floor hallway. Nova ushered Shayne into a plush office with curtained windows and furniture that had cost enough to keep a family of four a year.

"Sit down, Shayne," Nova said quietly.

Shayne sat. Nova went behind his mammoth desk and lit a thin cigar. His hands were soft and clean. Nova was the new breed of gangster: all polish, charm and brains. Only his eyes did not fit. They were smooth and careful and had seen all that there was to see in a hard world.

"Now, what can I do for you, Shayne?" the racketeer said.

Shayne laughed. "You're good, Nova. You're real good. Smooth as yoghurt, and twice as sour. I'll bet you carry a derringer."

"I've got men to carry my gun, Shayne," Nova said. "You didn't come way out here to do a comic routine."

"Men like Mendy Garcia?"

"Mendy carries a gun," Nova said.

"Not now. I took it away from him."

"I'll make a note that you're tough," Nova said.

"Mendy's in jail, Nova."

"Not for long."

Shayne took out a cigarette and lit it. Randy Nova smoked and waited calmly. Not a nerve twitched anywhere in the lean gambler's body.

"It's what I can do for you that interests me, Nova," Shayne said at last.

"What do you want to do for me?"

"You sent Mendy to get something that was delivered to me. You don't send your top gun unless you want something very bad."

"So?"

"So you've got some big problem, and I'm in the middle, and I don't like it."

Nova nodded. "I can appreciate that. Why don't you get out of the middle?"

"How can I do that?"

"How much do you want for the item in question?"

"You want to buy it?"

"If the price is right."

Shayne stood up. "Good. That's all I wanted to know."

Nova just watched him. "Sit down, Shayne."

"No, thanks," Shayne said. "You've told me what I needed. If I ever find the item in question I know it's worth money."

Nova opened his mouth to say something when the door in the left wall opened and a small young man stepped into the room. The newcomer was built like a slender weasel and had a face to match. His nose seemed to twitch like feelers testing the air, and his fish-grey eyes had a hungry shine.

Nova laughed straight at Shayne. "Come off it, Shayne. You're being kidded. I don't know what you're talking about. If Mendy got into a hassle with you it was on his own. I'll talk to him when he gets out."

The weasel man looked at Nova. "What's going on, Randy?"

"Nothing, Joe," Nova said easily. "A little misunderstanding between me and Mr. Shayne."

"Shayne, huh?" Joe Dann said. "How come you talk nice to a cheap peeper, Randy?"

"I talk nice to everyone, Joe," Nova said quietly.

"Yeh," Dann said. "That you do. No trouble, then?"

"Nothing I can't handle," Nova said.



Shayne laughed. "Come off it, Nova. You've got some kind of big trouble. Maybe both of you have. Now I could have what you want, and then again maybe I don't have it. Only I'll tell you this. If I've got it I'm going to find out what it's all about, and then I'm going to the police. I don't like smooth crooks, and I don't like tough crooks. I just wanted to find out how worried you were, and now I know."

The redhead turned on his heel and strode to the door. Joe Dann raised his voice. "Jeff!"

The door opened just as Shayne reached it and a big, bulky man stood there. Shayne scowled at the man.

"Get out of my way, punk."

The big man doubled a fist.

Shayne spoke over his shoulder. "If he doesn't get out of my way I'll break him in half. You'll have to call out the army, and Gentry knows I'm here."

The big man, Jeff, lunged. Mike

Shayne moved his chin a fraction. Jeff's fist whistled past. Shayne hit him with a combination so fast Nova and Dann never moved. Jeff crumpled to the floor.

"Why you two-bit—" Joe Dann began.

"Shut up!" Nova said through his teeth. "You want to get us shut down, Joe? You want trouble?"

Dann said nothing, but the breath whistled through his pinched nostrils as he watched Shayne.

"Go ahead, Shayne," Nova said.

Shayne went out and down the front stairs. He crossed the restaurant and the bar without looking around once. He went out the door and across the parking lot to the attendant's shack. His car came: he got into it and drove off.

Only then did he let out a long, slow breath and wipe the sweat from his face. He lit a cigarette. He began to grin as he drove back across the causeway into Miami.

He had stirred up the stew. Now he had to wait to see what came to the surface.

VI

THE FIRST THING that bubbled up was a small, round man with the face of a cherub and the soul of a moray eel.

Shayne had gone straight back to his office. On the way he had stopped for a bottle of Martel and a pair of lean roast beef sand-

wiches. The cherubic eel surfaced at nine o'clock.

Shayne heard the first furtive sound in his outer office and put down his brandy. He checked the automatic under his desk. Then he waited.

There was a knock at his inner door.

"Come in," Shayne called.

The fat little man sidled into the private office nervously but with a brave attempt to put up a big front. Shayne studied the cherub with washed-out blue eyes that did not look like they had slept in days.

"I know you," Shayne said.

"Sure, sure," the cherub said. "Freddie Coxie. You run me in once for runnin' a little con on some tourists."

"Who've you been conning lately, Coxie?"

The fat little man protested. "No cons, Shayne. I been legit. Straight legit."

Shayne studied the nervous Coxie. Unasked, the fat cherub with the crafty eyes sat down across the desk from Shayne and blinked at the redhead. Shayne studied him.

"You're a waiter, right, Coxie?" Shayne said.

"Yeah."

Shayne nodded. "At The Blue Grotto."

"I work there," Coxie said and licked at his thick lips.

"What did Nova send you here for?"

Coxie protested again. "Randy didn't send me!"

"Then what are you doing here?"

"I come to get my—uh—merchandise."

Shayne cocked an eyebrow. "Your merchandise?"

The fat little man nodded and reached into his pocket. He produced the torn half of a hundred dollar bill and a greedy leer.

"I sent you that key. This proves it. You match it up and see."

Shayne looked at the bill. "Anyone can come with half a hundred. You'll have to do better."

Coxie paled. "What do you mean, anyone? This bill'll match, you hear? That key is mine. I sent it to you because I know you're an honest private eye. Now I want it back. You keep the hundred and I got another hundred for the bonus."

Shayne nodded. He took out a cigarette and poured another three fingers of Martel. Coxie watched him nervously. Shayne got up, got another glass, and poured a drink of the good cognac for Coxie.

"Tell me about that key, Coxie. Where's the box it fits, and what's in the box that Randy Nova wants?"

"Tell you—no! That's my key! I hired you to keep it safe a while. Now it's okay and I need it back. Two hundred bucks! That's good pay."

"You didn't hire me for any-

thing, Coxie! You tried to use me for a patsy, maybe as an accessory in blackmail. That's what it has to be, blackmail."

"So? You don't know anything, see? You just got a package belongs to me. I just proved it. Now you hand it over!"

"All I'm going to hand over, little man, is you to the police! Now maybe you better tell me or you'll be telling—"

The gun appeared in Coxie's fat little hand. His eyes were the color of pale ink. The pistol was small and it shook like a leaf in the wind.

"Give me my key, Shayne!" Coxie said.

Shayne shrugged and stood up. He walked to his safe. Coxie came behind warily. Shayne opened the safe and turned with the envelope in his hand. Coxie reached for it.

"The half of the bill first, little man," Shayne said.

Coxie nodded eagerly. Shayne extended the envelope. Coxie grabbed for the envelope and put his pistol down on the desk to pick up the half bill. Shayne grinned.

Coxie blinked, became aware of his greedy stupidity. Shayne stepped in and hit the small man on the chin. Coxie flew half way across the room and collapsed. Shayne returned the envelope to the safe and scooped up the fallen man's pistol and put that in the safe, too.

Then he searched Coxie but

came away with nothing important. There were cards in the Waiters Union, an employment card for The Blue Grotto. The man's driver's license gave his address as 2220 N. Real Street, Miami Beach.

Shayne was still bending over Coxie when his telephone began to ring. Shayne looked at his watch. It was nine-thirty. He had a hunch something more was about to bubble up into the air.

"Yes?" he said into the receiver.

A woman's voice, low and urgent. "Mr. Shayne?"

"That's right."

"I've got to talk to you right away, Mr. Shayne."

"You know where I am."

"No! Not there. Meet me in the parking lot of The New Summit at ten o'clock. I'll see you."

The phone went dead. Shayne hung it up slowly. It could be a trap. But there was only one way to find out.

He turned to revive Coxie.

The floor was bare. Coxie was gone. Shayne's office door stood open.

VII

THE PARKING LOT of The New Summit was crowded with cars and empty of people. Mike Shayne parked and sat in his car. He did not have to wait long.

She appeared from close by and hurried to his car.

"Mr. Shayne?"

"Get in."

She got in and Shayne drove out of the parking lot.

"What's your name?" Shayne asked.

"Susan Roland," she said in a shaky voice.

Shayne looked at her. She was a small, slim girl with a pretty face, dark hair and a dazzling figure. She did not look very pretty now. She was scared and it showed.

"All right," Shayne said as he drove. "Start talking."

The girl was silent for a moment. She seemed to be seeing something out the window. "I—I think my girl friend has disappeared."

"Why come to me? How do you know me?"

"I saw you at the club tonight. I know who you are. I heard you had a fight with Mr. Nova and Mr. Dann. I wondered if maybe you knew something about Jenny, Mr. Shayne. Do you?"

"Did you work at The Blue Grotto that night?"

"I'm a cigarette girl. So was Jenny."

"Jenny who?"

"Ruiz," the girl said. "Jenny Ruiz."

"What makes you think she's disappeared?"

"I haven't seen her since she left the club last night. She had a date, real late, and then she was going home. She was supposed to meet me today on the beach. She

never showed up, and she hasn't come to work tonight."

"Why would she disappear?"

The girl was silent again. She stared out the window. Shayne saw her slim shoulders shudder. She did not look at Shayne when she spoke again.

"She—she was seeing Randy Nova. I mean, she had a thing going. Maybe for three months. I told her she should be careful, but she just laughed. She said he was the most exciting man she'd ever gone with."

"Was it Nova she had a date with last night?"

"I think so, but I'm not sure. Oh, Mr. Shayne, I know she's in some kind of terrible trouble. Mr. Nova's a dangerous man."

"I know how dangerous he is, but just being his girl-friend isn't especially dangerous. Do you know of any reason he'd want to hurt her or try to make her disappear?"

"No, not really. I guess she had other guys sometimes."

"Anyone special?"

"No."

"Was she pregnant?"

"Not that I know," Susan Roland said. "Besides, Mr. Nova isn't married."

"Was she putting pressure on him?"

"No! Jenny wasn't like that."

"Do you have any ideas about where she might go? Parents? Relatives?"

"Not that I know. Her parents are in Cuba, I think."

Shayne drove and thought. It might be something or nothing. Randy Nova was in some kind of bind, and Coxie had something on him.

It was possible it was connected to the Ruiz girl. Nova had a reputation as a ladies' man.

"All right," Shayne said, "I'll see what I can do. Where does she live?"

"At two thousand, two hundred and twenty N. Real Street, ground floor. That's on the Beach."

"I know where it is," Shayne said, but his mind was working real fast now.

The ground floor of 2220 N. Real Street! The same address that was on Coxie's driver's license. And Coxie had something. The circle was beginning to close. Shayne's stirring up was getting some results. He turned the car around.

"Where do you want me to drop you? Aren't you working tonight?"

"Working?" the girl said. "Oh, yes, of course. I—I just took my break now." Susan Roland looked at her watch. "I guess I better get back."

Shayne nodded and drove back to The Blue Grotto. He let the girl out near the club but not at the parking lot. He watched until she vanished in the service entrance. Then he U-turned and started back for 2220 N. Real Street.

VIII

IT WAS A semi-detached pink stucco house set in lush grounds. A good house, but not a rich neighborhood. Mike Shayne sat in his car for a few moments and studied the house. It looked like a place where a pretty cigarette girl with earning potential on the side would live. But it did not look like the place for Coxie. The fat little waiter had to have some sideline to afford the place.

Shayne went up the walk to the double entrances of the semi-detached. All four floors were dark. He circled the house and found no light anywhere. It did not look like Jenny Ruiz or Freddie Coxie were home. There was a back door. It was less exposed than the front entrance. Shayne took out his key ring and went to work.

The door opened on the fourth try with his keys. He stepped into a dark hall and closed the door behind him. It was a simple straight hall that led to the front door. Stairs went up on the right. The door to Jenny Ruiz's apartment was just inside the front door.

Mike Shayne checked the mail boxes that were just outside the front door. One read: *Jenny Sanchez Ruiz, Danseuse—Modelling*. The other read: *Frederick C. Coxie*.

Shayne went back inside and went to work on the door of Jenny Ruiz's apartment. It opened and he

went in. For a moment he stood and listened. He heard no sounds. With his flashlight he checked the apartment. There were three rooms, including the kitchen, and a bathroom. All three rooms were empty. The bed had not been slept in. The closets were empty. There were no suitcases. All make-up and perfume was gone.

"Skipped out," Shayne muttered aloud.

He checked the bedroom drawers. They, too, were empty. Then he stopped and listened. Something was humming, had just started to hum. Shayne went into the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. It was almost empty—but it was turned on. The redhead rubbed at his gaunt jaw. Why clean out a refrigerator and leave it running?

"It could happen," Shayne said aloud.

But it worried him. Randy Nova was very worried about something. Shayne went back into the living room and turned on the lights. The room was as neat as an exhibit in a museum. Maybe too neat. Shayne went and checked a desk in the far corner. The top was clear, but the drawers were not. He found papers in three drawers: tax forms; a box of stationary with some letters in it sent to Jenny Ruiz and in Spanish; and a box of bills, mostly paid.

"No," Shayne said, and began to study the room more closely.

At first there was nothing at all except the sense that it was too

neat for someone to have lived in it recently, or for someone to have left it in a hurry for a trip. Then he began to see the little things.

A chair was set in front of the desk, but the marks on the rug, and on the wall, indicated that the chair was usually not at the desk but against the wall beside it.

A lamp stood on an end table, but the cord did not quite reach the outlet. Shayne studied the lamp. There was a small dent in the copper base.

Shayne stood back and examined the lamp, the end table, the couch it stood beside, and the refectory table behind the couch against the wall.

The table was out of place. Shayne let his grey eyes stare around the room. There was a bare spot on the right wall filled now by a small table that was a coffee table.

Shayne picked up the refectory table and moved it to where he thought it belonged. He moved the couch back against the wall, and the end table with it. The lamp cord now reached the outlet. The coffee table obviously belonged in front of the couch. The redhead put it there.

Then he examined the coffee table. A deep scratch marred its left edge.

He got down on his hands and knees and examined the rug all around the front of the couch. There was the faintest of stains in a

large area lighter than the rest of the couch.

The rug had been washed—well washed.

Shayne stood up. He went to the rear window and looked out. The narrow back yard was thickly grown with tropical plants and flowers. He could see most of the yard, but much of it was in deep shadow.

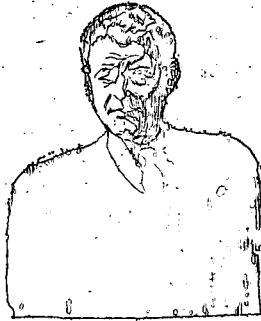
The detective turned out the lights and went out into the hall and then into the backyard. He looked up. Coxie's apartment was laid out exactly the same as the Ruiz girl's apartment. From his window Coxie could see the whole back yard.

Shayne got out his flashlight and began to search the backyard. It was not quick; and it was not obvious, but at last he found what he had begun to be sure he would find: Three thick rose bushes with the earth recently cultivated all around them.

The rest of the garden had not been cultivated for some weeks.

Shayne looked around and saw a small door in the rear of the building. There were still no lights in the building anywhere. He opened the small door and found the garden tools. He took a shovel and went to work at the base of the rose bushes.

The first thing he found was a thin cigar butt. He picked it up and looked at it. The label was still on: Del Rey Supremo, Vera-Cruz.



The second object was a woman's shoe.

It was not empty.

IX

TWO HOURS LATER Mike Shayne leaned against the wall of the building of 2220 N. Real Street and watched the police at work. Floodlights lit the scene. Police cars filled the street, and blue uniforms crowded the back yard, trampling the flowers.

The digging had stopped some time ago; the three rose bushes lay flung to one side and dying. The police cared about no one's garden when there was work to do. The medical examiner and his men were busy over something on the lawn. Stolid-faced patrolmen stood around them.

The medical examiner looked up and spoke to a small, dapper man in a neat blue pin-stripe suit. The dapper man stroked his pencil mustache, answered something,

and then turned and walked to Shayne.

"Is it the Ruiz girl?" Shayne said.

"It is," Chief of Miami Beach Detectives Peter Painter said. "Shot twice dead center. Small caliber weapon; probably only a twenty-five caliber automatic. Not too much bleeding. Both slugs still in her. The doc'll tell us more later."

"A twenty-five caliber?" Shayne said. "A private little gun."

"Lady's weapon, Shayne," Painter said.

"Or a smooth gambler," Shayne said. "How long has she been dead?"

"At least twenty-four hours, maybe more. The ME has to do his autopsy. The doc doesn't think she'd been with a man, but she was dressed to go out. Nothing else in the grave, but her place has been cleaned. I guess you know that."

Shayne nodded. "It was what made me look out here. Her place had been cleaned up by someone who didn't quite know the layout that well. It smelled like a fake runout."

"You think she was killed inside?" Painter snapped.

"It looks like it. Someone cleaned the rug."

Painter rubbed his mustache. "All right, Shayne. You found her. She wasn't even reported missing yet. I'll overlook that, you were

working in my territory without contacting me."

The dapper little Chief of Detectives and Mike Shayne were old antagonists. They did not like each other and never would, but they had a grudging respect for each other. Shayne was too independent for Painter's taste, and Painter was too rule-book and official-minded for Shayne. But the Chief of Detectives was a good cop when he could forget how good he looked in news pictures.

"I couldn't contact you, Painter," Shayne said. "I didn't even know what I was looking for."

"You just had a hunch there was a body somewhere," Painter said drily. The fashion-plate detective smoothed his expensive pin striped sleeve. "Start at the beginning. Now."

Shayne told Painter everything except the fact that he knew who had sent him the key. He wanted another talk with Freddie Coxie himself first. The Chief of Detectives listened with a scowl.

"So you just sat on that key, and no one came looking except Garcia?" Painter said. "What did you think that key was, a key to a grocery store? You didn't turn it over after Mendy Garcia tried for it? That's obstructing . . ."

"Technically I was protecting a client, Painter. I'd been hired," Shayne said. "Anyway, it wasn't in your jurisdiction."

"All right. Gentry can handle

his own end. The killing is in my back yard, and so is Randy Nova, and so are you. I want that key."

"You'll get it. You're going to pick up Nova?"

"So fast his head'll revolve," Painter said with a malicious grin. "I've been waiting for that gold-plated crook to slip for ten years. I knew that sooner or later he'd pull something his lawyers and his money couldn't bail him out of. Not even Chadwick. He'll hang this time."

Shayne rubbed his chin. "I don't know, Painter. Nova's a smart man with connections and boys who'd know how to kill in a hundred safer ways than knocking off his sweetie in her own rooms. It doesn't sound right."

Painter rubbed his hands. "It happens. That's just how a smart cookie like Nova gets careless."

Shayne nodded. It could happen. Easily. A sudden anger was exactly what did get a smoothie like Randy Nova. A little too much sure-of-himself carelessness.

"Randy smokes cigars, Shayne. Thin Mexican cigars."

"I know," Shayne said.

"I'm going to pick him up now. I'll check his cigars, his clothes, his toenails, and everything he's done for forty-eight hours. I'll come up with the proof. And I want that key from you in one hour flat. If it works the way it looks, that key maybe will clinch our case."

Shayne nodded. For once it

looked like Painter was right. Coxie had seen something, and had found something. Coxie both knew Randy Nova on sight, and knew enough to be scared of Nova if he was trying a little blackmail. And it had all the sound of Coxie putting the squeeze on Nova. Which made it seem even more that Nova was the killer.

With Susan Roland to finger Randy, Painter was in charge. Still, Shayne would like a small talk with Freddie Coxie.

X

MIKE SHAYNE went through the downstairs hall of 2220 N. Real and at the front door opened it and closed it. He listened. No police were in sight. Silently he went up the stairs to the second floor and let himself into Coxie's apartment.

It was laid out identically to the one below, but there the resemblance ended. Coxie's apartment was a shambles of dirt and confusion. The outer symbol of a chaotic mind. Astrology charts hung on the walls; self-help books lay piled on the floor; the biographies of successful men littered the tables. Nothing was clean and nothing was in order.

And there was another type of shamble—the rooms had been searched and not by a gentle hand. Coxie would not be coming back to this apartment, at least not for a long time. Shayne began a method-

ical search for any clue to the fat little waiter's whereabouts. He found nothing until he spotted an untouched letter that had slipped down behind the shabby desk.

It was from someone named Sarah, dated two months ago, and postmarked from Atlanta, Georgia. It sounded like the worried letter of a friend or relative. There was no return address, but Mike Shayne put the letter into his pocket anyway. Freddie Coxie had run somewhere.

The only other items of interest Shayne found were a dozen assorted pictures of Jenny Ruiz in various states of undress. It was clear why Coxie was living at 2220 N. Real, and why he would have noticed anything unusual that happened below in the apartment and yard of the dead girl.

Shayne slipped out of the apartment and went downstairs. In his car he drove back to his office. He got the key from his safe, and went back down to his car.

There were shadows in the street.

Shayne stopped near his car to light a cigarette. As he cupped the match and bent to light the cigarette, his grey eyes took in the whole dark street.

The shadow of a man leaned in a doorway across the street. It had the shape and manner of Mendy Garcia. The man did not move; he just leaned there watching.

A small black car was parked

half a block away. A man was behind the wheel. The car did not move, and the man in it did nothing.

Shayne got into his car and started the engine. The shadow that could be Mendy Garcia trotted across the street to the small black car and got in. Shayne drove off and the black car followed. Shayne made no attempt to lose the car, and the black car was content to follow at a distance.

Shayne drove across the causeway and straight to Miami Beach Police Headquarters. The black car parked a discreet distance away. The desk sergeant nodded him toward Painter's office.

"You got that key?" Painter snapped from his desk.

"I've got it," Shayne said, and handed it over to the dapper little detective. "You have Nova?"

"I've got him. He's sweating now," Painter said, and frowned at the key. "It'll take a while to find where this belongs. Maybe I won't even need it."

"Randy won't talk," Shayne said.

"He won't have to," Painter said. "He smokes Del Rey Supremos, made for him in Vera Cruz. He's got no alibi for the time last night, except Joe Dann, and Dann isn't very convincing. We found burned cloth in his incinerator, and traces of mud on his shoes. The lab's analyzing the mud now."

"Can I talk to him?" Shayne asked.

"What for?"

"Maybe I can get something out of him."

"Okay. He's in the question box. I'll pull my boys off."

Shayne went along the corridor of the late night building. Randy Nova sat in a straight chair under lights and looked a little the worse for wear. But the slender racketeer was still composed and calm.

"I figured you'd be around somewhere, shamus," Nova said.

"Painter's got you cold, Randy."

"Good for him."

"You buried her."

"Did I, shamus?"

"I've turned that key over to Painter. He'll find what Coxie had on you."

"It figures," Nova said.

"You're in bad trouble."

"That's why I've got lawyers," Nova said.

"You'll need more than lawyers. Painter's measuring the rope and you're on the business end."

"You got some ideas, Shayne?" he asked.

"Tell me what happened last night and I'll see what I can do."

Nova watched him. The handsome racketeer seemed to be thinking hard. Then he shrugged his slim shoulders.

"I'll play this hand a while. Painter can't prove I killed Jenny."

"If that's the way you want it," Shayne said.

"That's the way," Nova said.

Shayne left the racketeer smiling. Painter's men passed Shayne on their way back to Nova. The smooth racketeer still smiled as the cops converged around him.

Painter waited for Shayne outside the room. "Anything?"

"Nothing. He's going to sit pat and wait for Chadwick."

"Because there's nothing else he can do," Painter said with satisfaction. "This one is open and shut. You can go back to chasing stray wives, Shayne."

Shayne nodded slowly and walked out of Headquarters. The black car was gone, and no one watched him from the shadows. The detective tugged on his earlobe. Everything seemed to have come to an end—but Shayne did not believe it.

Only he was up against a dead end.

XI

MIKE SHAYNE dreamed of laughing men who dug in gardens and woke up with a sour mouth and a sour disposition.

He lit a cigarette and thought as the morning sun streamed in through his open window. He had to find Freddie Coxie, that was number one on the list. Then he'd like a talk with Joe Dann. The partner might know more about Nova than anyone else, and he might talk if his partner looked like

he was going to end up on the short end.

Shayne jumped out of bed, scrambled a half a dozen eggs, ate, and was soon on his way to his office. As he walked in his grey eyes blinked at the vision seated quietly in his outer office. Lucy Hamilton had a cold edge to her voice when she saw Shayne gape at the waiting woman.

"Mrs. Phelps has been waiting to see you, Michael," Lucy said sweetly, a bit too sweetly!

"Thanks, Angel," Shayne said with a grin. "Come right on in, Mrs. Phelps."

The vision walked ahead of Shayne into the private office. Shayne hung his hat and went behind his desk and studied her. She was tall, slender and cool. Her face was as smooth as cream and her blond hair was long and luminous like glass. Her eyes were green and smoky.

"Virginia Phelps, Mr. Shayne," the blond said. "I—I want you to find my husband."

"You mean someone married to you is missing?" Shayne said.

She smiled. "Thank you. I'm sure you know better than to think simple physical beauty will hold a man after a time. Besides, I'm afraid Roger has his reasons for drinking so much."

"Roger is a drunk and is missing," Shayne said. "What are his reasons?"

"Our marriage hasn't been good

for some time, Mr. Shayne, to be candid," Virginia Phelps said.

"What's wrong with it?"

"Me," Virginia Phelps said. "I'm afraid I met another man."

"So Roger hit the bottle," Shayne said. "It's natural. What isn't natural is that you want him found. If you've got another boy, why not let the man alone?"

"Because I don't think he'll let me alone. He took a gun with him. My gun, I'm afraid."

"You think he'll try to kill you or your new boy?"

"I think he already has."

Shayne watched her. His initial impression of her was going down fast. There was something too cool about Virginia Phelps. And alarm bells were ringing in his head.

"What's the name of your new man, Mrs. Phelps? Randy Nova?"

She nodded, but her eyes did not flinch. "Yes."

"How long?"

"Over a year now. Randy and I are planning to marry."

"And Roger doesn't like that?"

"No."

Shayne studied her. "Did Randy send you to me?"

"No, he knows nothing about this. He—he's a gentleman, Mr. Shayne. He knows that Roger tried to kill him, or me, or both of us, but he does not want me involved."

Shayne rubbed his chin. "You're saying that your husband took your gun and went to kill either you or Randy at North Real Street?



That he shot Jenny Ruiz by mistake? That Randy Nova has been covering for him to protect you?"

"Yes."

"You know what Randy was doing with Jenny Ruiz, but you still want to protect him?"

She flushed a bright pink. "I—I understand Randy. We could not meet as often as we would have liked. We are not married. The Ruiz girl was in his life before me. I am the one holding up our marriage because I was reluctant to divorce Roger. Under the circumstances, I can understand that Randy would want—company at times. Perhaps he was never sure of me, and, as I said, the Ruiz girl was before my time in his life."

"I see," Shayne said, "very rational, Mrs. Phelps. But now you think your husband is dangerous, and Randy comes first?"

"Yes."

"All right. Where do I look for him?"

"I'm not sure. He's done this before, and he always comes back

looking tired but at least sober. A man usually brings him back in a kind of truck."

"You think he goes to some kind of drying-out place?"

"That's what I think. The only clue I have is that once or twice after his disappearances he has mentioned a man named Waldo. A Doc Waldo something."

Shayne nodded and stood up. "Okay, Mrs. Phelps. I'll see if I can find Roger. By the way, do you happen to know a man named Freddie Coxie?"

"Coxie? No, Mr. Shayne. Should I?"

"I'm not sure," Shayne said. "Leave a retainer with my secretary. Anything will do. I have to be hired to work legally."

Virginia Phelps nodded. After she had gone, Shayne frowned for some time. Then he turned to his files. He took out his file on the quacks, the shadow-line medical men who could get you almost anything, and discreetly hide out anyone for a price. Privacy guaranteed behind a high fence and barred windows, and if there was a little extra in the needle, well, the doctor liked to help a sufferer.

Shayne kept his file pretty up-to-date, with a help from Gentry's office and the services of a larger agency in Miami. He worked for two hours and finally dug out three "Doc Waldos."

One was Dr. Waldo Penser, M.D., the operator of a private

sanatorium for tired businessmen whose psychiatrists had recommended complete rest. The kicker here was that only two psychiatrists ever recommended Dr. Waldo Penser, and they were both in New York. Probably a racket, but very legal.

The second was Dr. Waldo Jenks, D. Or. L.—Doctor of Organic Life. Jenks was a crook. The kind of quack who gave real, honest and dedicated organic healers a bad name with the general public. The kind of man who always hovered on the fringes of anything new and a little unfamiliar, preying on the unbalanced. Jenks ran a Healing Waters Center in a secluded area of Key Biscayne, and the real ‘natural’ doctors had been trying to put him out of business for years, but he was slippery and careful.

The last was “Doc” Waldo De Lange, who ran a health club just south of Miami. De Lange made no claims to being anything but a physical culturist, but two teenagers had complained of brutality and drugs. The investigations had turned up nothing but the fact that the teenagers were “disturbed”, and “Doc” De Lange believed in hard exercise.

Dr. Penser seemed too legal to bother with hiding drunks with guilty consciences. Jenks seemed too far out to handle drunks. De Lange was the best bet—a health club was a good place to dry out.

XII

DE LANGE’S HEALTH CLUB was a large concrete complex of three buildings between the highway and the sea. Palm trees shaded everything. A twelve-foot fence surrounded spacious grounds. Shayne got inside without trouble. Fat men were running all over the grounds, and a handsome behemoth was counting time to a flock of exhausted ladies in the pool.

Doc Waldo De Lange turned out to be a middle-aged giant of a man in a stained sweat suit. He seemed annoyed at being taken away from whatever was making him sweat.

“Mr. Shayne? What can I do for you?”

“I’m looking for a Mr. Roger Phelps.”

“Phelps?” De Lange muttered, and turned to his secretary. “Do we have a Mr. Roger Phelps with us, Jane?”

The girl made quite a show of consulting a revolving file. After a time she looked up and shook her head. “No, sir. No Phelps of any kind.”

De Lange nodded. “So. Is that all, Mr. Shayne?”

Shayne rubbed his chin. The performance had been smooth and innocent-seeming—if it had been a performance.

“I’m not sure,” Shayne said. “Maybe Phelps is in the closed file.”

"Closed file?"

"You know, Doc, the private cases. The anonymous in need."

Doc De Lange dropped fifty degrees of temperature. "The door is behind you, Mr. Shayne."

"Look, Doc, I'm not after you. You happen to be in my quack file. Roger Phelps is a drunk. He's vanished. He's probably resting up somewhere. You've got a high fence."

De Lange's face was beet red. "Quacks! I'm in your quack file? I could have you sued!"

"Sue me," Shayne said. "I'm ready to go to my lawyer."

De Lange grew redder. "Do you think I'd bother with drunks here, Shayne? I run a legitimate physical culture program for sober people who wish to improve their life and health."

"For a price, and a little too hard, I heard," Shayne said.

"That was—" and the Doc stopped, turned a natural color, and became deadly. "All right, I don't coddle spoiled brats. People come here voluntarily, and they leave the same way. I charge high. There's no law against it."

"How about the happy stuff, Doc?"

De Lange smiled. He was not amused. "Shayne, I have ten men who could throw you into a hospital with one hand. I could perhaps do it myself, despite your obvious size. But I have lawyers for people like you. Now, in ten seconds, if you

are not gone, I will call my lawyers."

Mike Shayne went. The doc was probably a crook somewhere; he had been too quickly angry and too quickly cooled down. But if De Lange wasn't a crook, Shayne had slandered him in front of a witness, and that was not legal.

In his car he turned back and headed for Key Biscayne.

"Doctor" Jenks place was out of Lotusland. A cluster of neat bungalows around a large old mansion with barred windows on the top floor. It was a mile from the nearest human habitation, on a spit of sand surrounded by water, swamp and another high fence. There was no sign and the gate was locked.

Mike Shayne parked and got out to approach the gate, which had no bell or other method of announcing a desire to enter. Casual visitors were not wanted at the Healing Waters Center.

A rough-looking character emerged from nowhere. He had a gun on his hip. He looked like he knew how to use it.

"Beat it," the character said.

"I want to see Jenks," Shayne said.

"Doctor Jenks, bud, and he don't want to see you."

"How do you know, sonny?" Shayne said.

The rough character grinned. "Because you didn't call him Doctor, and you didn't name who sent you. Now blow. You want to talk

to the doctor, call him up. He's in the book."

Without another word, the character turned and vanished back into the bushes. Shayne rubbed his chin. Guns and hidden guards had a smell. But he couldn't jump the fence here. The character was gone but was watching him from somewhere.

Shayne got back into his car and drove off. Before crashing the gate he decided to visit his last Waldo—Dr. Waldo Penser, M.D.; the real thing.

Penser's sanatorium was in a large brick house on a quiet street of mansions. It had no fence; it had an ivy-covered wall. A uniformed guard sat at the gate. There was no trouble about getting in. Dr. Penser greeted Shayne in his cool office.

"Sit down, Mr. Shayne," Penser said evenly.

Shayne sat. Penser was a middle-sized man of middle-age but far above middle-income judging by his office and his clothes. The corridors of the big house had been quiet, cool and deserted.

"I'm looking for a Roger Phelps," Shayne said. "He—"

"Why?" the Doctor broke in.

"Because his wife hired me."

"Ah, then you're a detective? You had the look. Tell me about Mr. Phelps."

"He's a drunk, probably drying out, and may be wanted by the police pretty soon," Shayne said.

"What police?"

"The real police."

Penser waved a manicured hand. "No, I mean the police of what city?"

"Miami. Where else?"

"Ah, then I can't help you. All my clients are from New York. They are all referred here for rest."

"I know. It's in my file," Shayne said.

"You have a file on me? Why?"

"Because you handle only rich people from New York sent by only two psychiatrists."

Penser nodded. "True, true. I have a good situation. Rich people who want an excuse to do nothing, or hide, or evade. Yes, I do pretty well."

Penser was a smooth sharpie. Not a crook, no, but the sharp dollar. A man who overcharged for what people did not need. The sharp dollar, all legal.

"You don't just happen to run a little clinic for drunks on the side? Do some favors for local friends?"

"Good grief, Shayne, never! I certainly don't need the extra money, and I'd be laying myself open to possible local troubles. No, no. I wouldn't treat a hangnail in Miami."

Shayne believed Penser. The man was too smart to be greedy. Mumbo-jumbo for rich hypochondriacs. The food was sure to be good, the medical excuses valid for breaking contracts, and the

prices only ten times that of the best hotel. Everyone was happy.

XIII

MIKE SHAYNE parked his car a half mile from the fence of Jenks' place on Key Biscayne. He walked carefully through the palms and brush to a point from where he could see the fence. All was quiet.

He moved silently along the fence, away from the gate and toward the Biscayne Bay side of the Key. When he reached the water he saw that the fence ran out only some ten feet. Jenks did not expect a visit by water.

Shayne undressed to his skin, tied his clothes in a neat bundle held together by his belt, and slipped into the water. He held his clothes up and swam with one hand. He only had to swim a short way to get around the fence; then he touched on the other side and waded ashore.

Dressed, he listened, but he heard no sounds. He made his way cautiously through the brush and trees until he was close to the large house with the barred windows at top. He crouched in the bushes to watch for a time.

A few people wandered about in very little. They did not look healthy, but they looked hopeful. On the porch of one cabin two women stretched nude in the sun. Little else seemed to be happening. Shayne moved out and ap-

proached the main building. A few people looked at him curiously, as if they hoped that he had come to join them.

Inside the main building there was no receptionist. A corridor led to the right. There were small signs above the office doors. Shayne found the name of Dr. Waldo Jenks over the last door. He walked in without knocking. There was a small outer office that was empty. The door to a large inner office was open. A stocky man with wisps of grey hair and a long nose sat at a desk.

The stocky man did not notice Shayne enter. He was too busy. He was having his lunch—from a bottle. And enjoying every ounce of it as he stared moodily out his rear window at a deserted beach. Business did not look good.

"Dr. Jenks?" Shayne said.

The man jumped a foot and dropped his glass. He whirled in his chair and gaped at Shayne.

"The name's Michael Shayne," he said, and extended his card.

"How—how did you get—"
Jenks stammered.

"How did I get in? It wasn't easy with your goon at the gate. I wonder if he has a license for that gun?"

Jenks looked at Shayne's card. "A shamus!"

"You can read! Now I want to talk to Roger Phelps."

Jenks had recovered from his surprise. He laid Shayne's card on

his littered desk, slowly poured another drink of whisky, and looked up.

"Who's Roger Phelps?"

"A drunk you're hiding out and drying out."

"Don't make me laugh. I've got an organic healing center here, nothing more. Who sent you, some of my colleagues?"

"Come off it, Jenks. Phelps' wife knows he dries out with a Doc Waldo. You're the only Doc Waldo crooked enough to have a drying-out racket."

Jenks drank. "Get lost, Shayne. They've all tried to get me and they can't. Beat it the way you came or I'll have Maxie and his pals play ping-pong on your skull before they toss you out. You're trespassing. I can murder you."

"No you can't, Jenks. If any of your goons show up here I've got you cold. Now let's see Phelps."

Jenks laughed. "Shayne, you slay me. Now if he is here, it's for privacy, right? So if he don't want you to see him, why should I let you? Always assuming he's here, which he isn't."

"He's here," Shayne said, "I know that now, for sure. Up in one of those barred-window rooms. You wouldn't be holding a man against his will, would you?"

"Keep talking, shamus. You slay me. You really do."

Jenks hand seemed to crawl lightly across his desk. Shayne watched it out of the corner of his

eye. The hand seemed to have a life of its own.

"If that hand gets near a button or a buzzer, Jenks, you better start making reservations in a hospital," Shayne said.

Jenks looked at his hand and pulled it back slowly.

"No, you wouldn't hold a man, but you sort of make them want to stay longer, right? That's the racket. Keep them doped up until they sign a big check."

Jenks suddenly snarled. "Talk, shamus. You're just making big wind."

"Am I? Listen, small-timer," Shayne said. "This Phelps isn't just drying out, he's hiding out. And he's hiding out in a murder case!"

For a moment Jenks sat as if he had turned to solid stone. Then the stocky man went ghastly and stared at Shayne.

"If I don't take him out of here, the police will. You're in Painter's territory, Jenks. You know Painter, right? All I have to do is say one word to Painter and he's here with his army. I wonder what he'll find if he has to come in after a suspect in a killing?"

Jenks blinked. Blinked again. "Murder? You're just—"

"Am I? You mean he hasn't been acting funny?"

"God!" Jenks swore. Then the stocky man jumped up. "Come on. How did I know? He's been here a couple times before. A nice guy.

He sobers up, pays a good check, and no trouble."

Shayne followed Jenks along the corridor and then up a wide flight of stairs. They went all the way to the top. Jenks was sweating rivers in the hot day, but it wasn't the heat.

"Listen, Shayne, if I let him go with you, no charge, you'll keep me out of it? I mean, how did I know? I was just doing him a favor."

Shayne said nothing. Jenks continued to sweat. They stopped out in front of a door. Jenks unlocked it and glanced at Shayne, as if hoping that somehow Shayne would not notice that the door had been locked.

Shayne pushed the stocky man aside and stepped carefully into the room.

He caught the glint of movement behind him.

Shayne whirled. Jenks had a blackjack and was half way down in his swing at Shayne's head. The redhead moved his head and the blackjack whistled past. Shayne hit Jenks with a short left.

Jenks went down and skidded across the floor of the corridor. But Jenks did not go out. He scrambled up and ran for the stairs. Shayne watched him vanish. He let him go. Jenks was not going to think about anything now but flight—far and fast.

Shayne turned to the room and stepped inside.



XIV

AT FIRST Mike Shayne saw nothing. The room was dim with heavy shades drawn over the barred window.

Then he saw the bed and the man lying on it. The man had not even moved his head to look toward Shayne. If he had heard the sounds of the fight it had not interested him.

Shayne stepped up to the bed. Was the man drugged? Then he saw the man's head move. A pair of deep but clear eyes looked at him.

"So you got around to me," the man said. He looked away again, up at the ceiling. "I suppose I knew you would sooner or later."

"Phelps?" Shayne said.

"Roger Phelps, lover and husband," the man said. "Why did you have to bother with me?"

"Where's the gun, Phelps?"

The man's ravaged face turned again, looked at Shayne. "The gun?"

Now that his eyes were accustomed to the dark, Shayne saw that the man was tall, slim, about forty. A handsome man with fine brown hair and a sensitive mouth—only now he was not handsome. His face in the dim light was like the ravaged side of a volcano.

"The gun you took with you."

"The gun I took with me," Phelps said.

Shayne went closer. "Are you drunk?"

"Probably."

"Drugged?"

The man laughed. "No, not much. I let Jenks use some on me; it makes him feel he's putting something over. No, I'm not drunk now, and I'm not drugged. I wish I were . . ."

"Why?"

"Because I love my wife."

"What kind of love is it when she's in love with another man, and a crook at that?"

"The hard kind," Phelps said, shrugging.

"If you're not drunk or drugged, what are you doing here? Why hide out?"

"Why does anyone hide out? To hide," Phelps said. "Are you here to arrest me? I suppose so."

Shayne lighted a cigarette and leaned against the wall. He let his grey eyes study the man. Phelps watched him.

"I'm not the police, Phelps. My name's Mike Shayne."

Phelps stared at him, then sat up quickly. "Not the police? Then you better be ready for Jenks and his goon squad! This is a drunk-cure racket operation, among other things."

"Don't worry about Jenks and his goons. They're running if I know them, and I know them. They'd have to kill us both now to stop the whole operation blowing up, and people like Jenks don't kill people. Only if cornered."

Phelps watched Shayne. Then he nodded. "Of course, you're right. I'm police trouble. Who are you?"

"A private detective hired by your wife to find you."

Phelps lay back against the wall. "Hired by my wife? To find me? Why on earth would she want to find me?"

"To save Nova," Shayne said bluntly. "She'll toss you into the rope to save Randy Nova, Phelps. And you love her?"

"Tell me the details, Mr. Shayne," Phelps said quietly.

Shayne explained the whole affair, from beginning to end. The end was the visit of Virginia Phelps and her implicit accusation of Phelps as the killer of Jenny Ruiz.

"So she thinks I killed the Ruiz girl, thinking I was getting either her or Nova? Then I panicked, got drunk, ran and holed up here from the police?"

"That's the way she tells it," Shayne said.

"Then that must be the way it is," Phelps said.

"Randy Nova doesn't seem to think so," Shayne said.

"Why?" Phelps said.

"He wouldn't take the fall for you. He wouldn't clam up and trust his lawyer just for you. And he wouldn't have buried the body and tried to fake a runout just for you."

"Why not? He was in a room with a dead girl-friend. The gun was there. With his record the police would have had a field day, just the way they are now."

"How do you know the gun was there?"

"I dropped it when I ran," Phelps answered.

"So you were in that apartment, and Randy Nova was there, and you shot twice at Randy and hit the Ruiz girl twice?"

"I'm a bad shot. I panicked. She got between us."

"And Randy just let you run out, and then covered your killing?"

"I still had the gun as far as the door. He wasn't dressed. So I made it out."

Shayne watched the ravaged face of the man. Phelps spoke well, without hesitation. The man's eyes were clear and steady now as he answered the questions.

"That's some story," Shayne said.

"It's my story."

"Do you know a man named Coxie?"

"No," Phelps said.

"Okay," Shayne said. "Let's go and try the story on the police. At least it clears Nova."

"That's too bad," Phelps said. "I'd like him to take the fall, but I have to tell the truth, don't I? My soul, you know. I can't live with the guilt."

"Get your things," Shayne snapped.

"I'm wearing them."

Phelps found his suit coat, straightened his tie, brushed at his hair, and walked out of the barred room with Shayne. They went down and found a few poor souls wandering around looking for Dr. Jenks. Shayne told them to pack up and go home. They stared at him as if they didn't know where home was.

Shayne and Phelps walked to the gate. It was wide open. No one tried to stop them. They walked on to where Shayne had left his car.

XV

IT WAS A good house in a good suburb of Miami. The downstairs had all the shades drawn in the afternoon sun. Nothing seemed to move in the house. Phelps looked out of Mike Shayne's car at the house.

"Why here, Shayne?" Phelps said.

"Because I want to watch your

wife hear you tell that story before we go to the police."

"Don't you believe my story?"

"There's too much in this mess I don't like, Phelps. Randy Nova was too worried about a punk blackmailer who should never have had the nerve to go up against him."

"Everybody gets courage sometimes," Phelps said.

"Coxie picked me, and he should never have picked me if he wanted to make money. There's more, but that's enough for now."

"I don't want to talk to Ginny."

"Probably not, but you're going to if I have to drag you. I want to see her face when you try to hang yourself."

Phelps looked at the redhead a moment, then shrugged and got out of the car. They walked up the driveway and across the path to the front door. Shayne rang. There was no answer. Shayne frowned.

"Is that her car in the garage?" Shayne asked.

"Yes. She's probably sleeping. She sleeps a lot in the afternoons."

"You had a great marriage," Shayne said. "Use your key."

Phelps got out his key and opened the door. The house was shaded and dim and silent. Shayne listened. It had the feel of a deserted house. Phelps looked around as if not sure he was in the right place. Shayne rubbed his chin.

"Come on," Shayne said.

Together they searched the

downstairs. Then Shayne led the way upstairs. At the top of the stairs they both stopped. A chair lay on its side in the upstairs hall. Phelps went white.

"Which is her bedroom?" Shayne snapped.

"First door on the left. You think—"

Shayne didn't answer. He strode to the first door on the left and threw it open. Phelps was behind him. The ravaged face of the man collapsed. Phelps leaned against the door frame, his head against the frame.

She lay on the floor beside the bed. In a pool of blood. She had been shot once in the heart, and not by a small caliber weapon. From the look of the bed she had been asleep, had awakened, and had had time to see her killer. Her staring eyes had a look of horror.

Shayne bent down over the beautiful woman who wasn't even a woman anymore. Her left hand was clenched into a fist. Shayne pried the fist open. A small square of gold lay in the fist. A thin length of broken gold chain hung from either side of the square of gold. On the square were three ornate initials: J.M.G.

Shayne stood up and looked at the small piece of gold with its broken chain. J.M.G. Jesus Mendez Garcia: Mendy Garcia. It could be. The small square was part of a tie-clip—an expensive one, the letters set with small chip

diamonds and rubies. A very identifiable tie clip.

Shayne turned to the door. Phelps had straightened up and was looking now at the body of his wife. His sick eyes looked at Shayne's hand.

"What's that—what you found in her hand?"

"A tie clip."

"The killer's?"

"Probably."

"Give it to me!"

"No," Shayne said. "You want to tell me the real story now?"

Phelps looked at Shayne, then at his dead wife, and then back at Shayne. "She's dead. Who killed her? Why?"

"I don't know. Tell me the real story."

Phelps blinked, looked at the body. "Nova's in jail. The police say Nova killed the Ruiz girl."

"Only you say you did," Shayne said.

Phelps's eyes suddenly gleamed in his ravaged face. "How could I have killed her? I wasn't there. I was in a bar ten miles from North Real, and I can prove it."

"Can you?"

"Yes. I can prove it," Phelps said.

"So Nova takes the fall," Shayne said. "Your wife's dead and you've got an alibi. That leaves Randy Nova, and the police will love that."

"So will I," Phelps said. "Nova killed her, didn't he? I mean, he

killed Ginny! Who else would kill Ginny? She must have known he killed the Ruiz girl; that was why she was willing to say it was me. To protect Nova."

"And you were going along with it?"

Phelps looked at Shayne. "I told you I loved her. I would have died for her, but not for Randy Nova. He killed her! It has to be him!"

"Nova's in jail. A murder charge, no bail," Shayne said.

Phelps laughed. "He's got men! He had her killed. Everyone knows that. What you found. In your hand. I'll bet it proves Nova had her killed to shut her up!"

Shayne nodded slowly. "Yes, it makes it look that way."

"Everyone knows Randy Nova!"

"Yes," Shayne said. "Everyone knows Randy Nova."

He went to the telephone to call Painter.

XVI

PETER PAINTER straightened up from the body of Virginia Phelps and grinned. The dapper Chief of Detectives was not a callous man; he was only a policeman. The dead woman wasn't flesh and blood and someone's wife, she was a piece in a murder case. Her husband wasn't a man in the room with his dead wife; he was a link in a chain that would solve a case.

"So, Nova had her killed to shut

her up. That just about closes it. We'll pick up Mendy Garcia and he'll talk," Painter said.

"You think you'll take Mendy alive, Painter?" Shayne said.

Painter rubbed at his pencil mustache. "I suppose not, but we'll try."

"And if you don't?"

Painter shrugged. "It won't matter. With that tie clip you found in her hand and all the rest, we've got Nova cold."

"Tell me about the rest."

"Why not, Shayne? Let's go down to Headquarters. We're finished here. Phelps, I'll need your statement."

Painter went out and Phelps followed. Shayne brought up the rear. Outside the Chief of Detectives climbed into his car with Phelps. Shayne followed in his car.

At Headquarters Painter sat behind his desk and waved Shayne and Phelps to seats. The dapper little Chief of Detectives spoke into the intercom in a low voice. Then Painter sat back and grinned at Shayne.

"First, Shayne, we traced that key. We found the safe deposit box. You know what was in it?"

"A twenty-five caliber automatic," Shayne said.

Painter scowled. "That's right. How long have you known that?"

"About one minute. It had to be the right guess. It was Virginia Phelps's gun. That's why she mentioned the gun to me, and tried to

make me believe her husband had taken it with him. She knew it was at the murder scene."

Painter nodded. "Which proves she knew Nova killed the Ruiz girl, right? With her gun. She was trying to protect Nova. Only Randy decided she knew too much; he didn't trust her after he thought about it."

"Maybe," Shayne said. "What I want to know is how Roger here knew the gun was at the scene of the killing?"

"Ginny told me," Roger Phelps said quietly. "She told me that Nova had killed the Ruiz girl with her gun. She had been with Nova. She said she loved him anyway."

"And what else?" Shayne said.

"That's all. I didn't ask for details. She said she was leaving me, so I went out and got drunk and ended up at Jenks' place, where you found me."

"You could have slipped out of Jenks' place," Shayne said. "I got in pretty easy. You could have bribed Jenks. You could have killed your wife."

"Why?"

Painter waved his hand. "Damn it, Shayne, how would Phelps get that tie clip? You think Mendy Garcia gives out his tie clip?"

"It was just a thought," Shayne said.

Painter looked disgusted. Just then his intercom buzzed, and the Chief mumbled into it. The outer door opened and Freddie Coxie

sidled in nervously. The fat little waiter grinned at Shayne, then looked scared.

"Okay, Coxie, tell your story again," Painter said.

"Sure, Chief, sure," Coxie said eagerly. "Well, I was up in my apartment, see. I heard this yelling downstairs in Jenny's apartment. I—I liked Jenny, so I used to listen sometimes down a pipe, you know? You could hear pretty good. I—"

Painter broke in. "We've tested it out, Shayne. You can hear pretty good as he says. Okay, go on, Coxie."

Coxie licked his lips. "Well, I heard this fight. Then I hear the hall door close down there. I go to my window and see this tall dame come out and get into a car I ain't seen out front before. She drives off fast, and I go back to my listening. Then I hears these shots—two shots.

"I'm scared, you know, so I doesn't know what I should do. After a while I hear the door down there again. I look out and I see Randy Nova come out. He walks off fast. I don't know what happened downstairs, and I like Jenny, so I go down to have a look."

Coxie wiped his face and grinned. "I mean, I got a key to Jenny's pad, you know? We were friends, and she leaves me her key to keep an eye on her place when she goes away. Anyway, I go down.

"She's there in front of the couch, dead. There's blood all over.



The furniture is knocked around. I figure to call the cops, see, only I hear a car! Then I see the gun on the table, this small automatic. I pick it up and run out and back up to my place. I hear a couple of guys come in downstairs.

"I mean, hell, I've got that gun. All of a sudden I know I got a fortune, see? Only I also got trouble. That gun's gonna be missed and quick. So I go out my front window and down and I run fast. I hole up in a hotel, but I'm still scared. I got to have insurance."

Coxie's face took on a crafty look and he glanced at Shayne. "I remember Shayne. He's a tough private eye, and he ain't gonna be scared of Randy Nova. Same time, Randy's gonna be worried about Shayne, see? So I wait for morning and I send the messenger with the key to the box where I stashed the gun. Then I calls Randy!

"He's pretty mad, and he's pret-

ty mean. Only I tell him he can't get the gun he don't pay me. And I tell him what I did with the key. He lets me be. I figure he'll try and get the gun without paying me, but I figure Shayne'll handle him. I keep looking in the papers for Jenny to get found. Only she don't get found.

"Most of the day goes, and then Randy calls me and says okay he'll make a deal. He'll pay ten grand for that gun! Ten grand! So I go to Shayne for the key. That's when Shayne tosses me around and while he's on the phone I beat it. I went home to figure how to get the gun without the key. I'm still figuring when I hear all about Randy getting picked up and Jenny being found."

Coxie shrugged. "I check the bank and the cops have got the gun. I'm out ten grand. Only now I figure Randy still ain't gonna like me, so I came here to Painter. That's it."

There was a silence in the office. Shayne slowly lighted a cigarette. Phelps stared at the floor. Painter literally beamed as Coxie finished his story.

"You heard it, Shayne? An eye witness—with the gun in the box to prove his story. He saw the dame leave *before* the shots, and Randy leave after the shots! Nova's cooked! With that cigar butt to prove he buried her, mud on his shoes that matches, the burned clothes, and now proof that his boy

Mendy Garcia killed the Phelps dame who knew he was alone with the Ruiz broad, he's as good as buried!"

Shayne nodded. "It looks airtight all right. You don't even have to worry about motive, about *why* Nova would shoot the Ruiz girl in her own place, not with Randy's record.

The jury won't even ask questions. Even Chadwick won't get a jury to worry about why a smart boy like Randy did such a stupid killing and then just buried her in the backyard."

Painter laughed. "Who cares about his motive? It could be a hundred things. She was threatening him. She had something on him and was using it to try to break him from the Phelps dame. Maybe they was secretly married. Who knows why a punk like Nova uses a gun? The D.A.'ll handle that part. And using Mendy to knock of a witness is the clincher! I've got an all points out on Garcia. If we get him alive, swell. If not, we'll get the gun he used and that'll be that. The jury won't be out five minutes."

Shayne looked at Phelps. "How does it sound to you, Phelps?"

The ravaged man didn't bat an eye. "It sounds swell."

"One point worries me, Phelps," Shayne said, and he turned to face Painter as he spoke. "Why did Virginia have that gun with her, and what was she doing at Ruiz's

apartment? Randy wouldn't take her there."

"She went to kill one of them, or both," Phelps said simply. "She told me that. Only when she got there she couldn't do it. Nova took the gun. I guess he decided to get rid of Ruiz. Who knows what happened after my wife left?"

"There's the lid, Shayne," Painter said. "The women on the jury'll hate Randy Nova on sight."

"Very neat," Shayne said. "Too bad you didn't get Phelps' statement before Coxie told his piece. Phelps tells a lot of yarns, all different."

Painter purpled. "You telling me my job? We didn't need Phelps or his statement. Probably won't even use it. Let's hear your story if you have one."

"I don't have one. How could I? It's open and shut. As neat as a pin. Nobody could have done a better job on Randy if he'd done it on himself."

The redhead got up and walked out of Painter's office. Behind him Painter scowled. Coxie sat without expression. Only Roger Phelps watched Shayne go. Phelps had a small smile on his wasted face.

XVII

IT WAS JUST dark when Mike Shayne parked in front of the art supply store again. He strode in and was greeted by the same tall, arty type female.

"Do we go into the dance again, honey, or do I just get sent back to see Marty?" Shayne said.

"The door's where you left it, shamus," the woman said.

Shayne went back to the door, identified himself to the unseen eye, and was passed along the small hall into the horse room. Marty Bell looked up. The mountaineer of a man pushed a betting slip at Shayne.

"Make your pick, sucker, and I'll take good care of your money," Marty said.

Shayne wrote the name of Mendy Garcia on the slip. Marty looked at it.

"You got a fixation, Shayne."

"This time I want to get word to the party."

"Maybe can do. What word?"

"He's on the short end of the finger," Shayne said. "He's cold decked and the ace is coming up."

"He knows he's hot. Everyone does."

"Long gone?"

"Who knows? Maybe not. Mendy got connections."

Shayne stood up. "If he wants the feed-bag noise, he ought to locate me around his headquarters. See you, Marty."

"Any time, Mike."

The fat man went back to his telephones. Shayne left and got back into his car. He drove slowly in the early night across the causeway into Miami Beach. He checked his gun on the sun-shield

of the car, and the automatic in his shoulder holster. He let the Syrian field marshal park his car, and walked to the locked side door of The Blue Grotto.

He knocked and looked up at the tiny hole above the door. A closed-circuit television camera. Even the hoods were electronic these days. After a time the door buzzed lightly. Shayne stepped in. Hands came out of the dark to frisk him. Shayne let the hands take his automatic until he could see that there was only the one man.

"Go on up, peeper," the hard man said.

Shayne nodded, turned to go up, and watched the gunman out of the corner of his eye. The hood relaxed and started to slip Shayne's automatic into his pocket. Shayne turned and hit the man on the point of the chin as hard as he could.

The man dropped without a sound. Shayne retrieved his gun, took the hood's gun, and hoisted the man onto his broad shoulders. He lugged the inert form up the stairs to the curtained alcove. He peered out. The corridor was empty. A broom closet was on the left.

Shayne set the man down behind the curtain in the alcove and swiftly removed his pants and underpants. He tied the man's hands with his belt, tied the feet with the man's pants, and gagged him with his underwear. Then he hoisted

the man again, checked the corridor, and carried him quickly to the broom closet. He dumped the inert form down into the closet and closed the door.

He wiped sweat from his eyes, and shifted his automatic from his holster to the small of his back inside his belt. He took the gunman's gun, dropped it inside the closet and closed the door again. Then he stepped along the corridor to a door marked: *Private*.

It was the door of the office next to the office where he had talked to Randy Nova. Shayne knocked.

"Yeah?"

Shayne stepped in. Joe Dann looked up from behind his desk. The slender young man smiled with his weasel face. It was an easy smile, but the fish grey eyes had hard scales on them.

"You got business with me, shamus?"

"Private," Shayne said.

The big man named Jeff lounged on a couch in the corner. Jeff was not smiling. The big man was measuring Mike Shayne for a return match.

"Jeff's a shadow," Dann said, "forget him."

"You forget him," Shayne said. "I got a story for private ears. Really private."

Dann hesitated. Shayne opened his coat. The empty holster gaped.

"Your door-boy de-fused me, Dann. How much protection do you need?"



"You got something spit it out,"
Dann said.

"Maybe I ought to tell it to Mendy Garcia," Shayne said, and turned for the door. "Yeah, I'll tell Mendy my story."

"Jeff!" Dann said.

The big man moved fast toward Shayne. Shayne moved faster. Like a lot of men who are proud of their muscles, Jeff scorned the use of a gun on an unarmed man. He came on with a grin. Shayne didn't wait. He jumped at the big man, forced a too-fast left lead, and kicked Jeff in the belly.

The big man grunted but did not go down. Shayne let Jeff recover and lunge, stepped inside the swing, and hit the big man twice more in the belly in the same spot. Jeff went down, cawing for air. Shayne whirled on Dann, who had his gun out.

"Damn it, Dann, I came to talk business—private business! How small-time can you get? You think I got all my ammunition in my head? You want to be a big man, be a big man!"

Joe Dann watched Shayne. Jeff came up to his knees with deep hatred all over his thick face. Jeff got to his feet. His beefy hand went toward his gun. Dann's pistol flicked.

"Out, Jeff!" Dann said.

"But, boss—"

"Out! And don't listen. Watch the hall."

Jeff, his hatred dripping, turned and went out.

Dann sat down and put his pistol on the desk.

"Okay, Shayne. Let's hear this business."

Shayne sat down slowly, insolently, and took out a cigarette. He scratched a kitchen match on the chair and lit the cigarette. He blew smoke.

"So you're the big man now,"
Shayne said.

Dann's eyes never flickered.

"Did you plan it, or did it fall into your lap?" Shayne said.

Dann watched him.

Shayne smiled. "No, it fell in, right. But you knew how to handle it when it came, didn't you?"

"Handle what, Shayne? If you got business, you better get to it before I call four guys like Jeff. Man, Jeff—he don't like you much."

"Handle what? Hell, Dann, the frame of Randy Nova," Shayne said with a grin.

XVIII

JOE DANN fingered his pistol. Then he hooked his thin fingers

into his vest pockets and let his fish eyes go blank.

"How did I frame Randy?"

"You want the whole story?" Shayne said. "First we talk the dollars. Now I got it all written out and in a safe place. Will Gentry knows where it is; he doesn't know what it is. Will trusts me, and that's real nice. Let's talk about ten grand. That's what Randy offered Coxie for the gun."

"What gun?" Dann said.

"You mean you haven't heard they've got Randy cold as dead meat?"

"Chadwick'll get him off."

"Not this time. He's wrapped up in gift wrapping, and you know it. Hell, you did it."

"You got a big mouth, Shayne."

"Only here, Dann, if you want it that way. I'm giving you a sample free. You've got him hogtied, Dann. It worked. Painter's already measuring the coffin."

Dann blinked his fish eyes. Shayne smiled and smoked and looked every inch the eager man with a deal. But his ears were alert, and he heard the very faint sound. It was in the hall, and it was a quick, smothered gasp. Dann did not seem to have heard it. The price of feeling safe behind a wall of guards.

"So Randy's finished," Dann said. "I'm not crying. He was a jerk with the dames. He was asking for the deep freeze. A guy who's careless with dames ain't liked up top.

The Organization don't trust a careless chaser."

"So you cleared it up high," Shayne said. "That was smart. Now be smarter. All you need is a clean bill with the cops. The organization won't back you until you're clear, right? Except for me, you're clear now. Ten thousand buries it all."

"Ten thousand for what?"

Shayne stubbed out his cigarette in an ashtray on Dann's desk. He leaned back in his chair, half-turned, legs crossed, so that his left side only leaned against the chair back and his right hand rested on his hip.

"Okay, listen. I'll make it brief. It played all wrong if Randy had really shot the Ruiz dame. Painter knows that, but he wants Randy too bad to face it. He's not thinking, but I am."

Dann said, "You talk a lot, but you don't say nothing."

"Okay. First, that Susan Roland came to me too easy. She led me to the Ruiz girl. She works for you and Randy. On her own she'd be too scared to finger Randy, you know? Hell, Dann, she had to have been sent to me and by someone who could protect her.

"Second, Coxie's story stinks. Sure, most of it is true, I guess; but Coxie would never have had the nerve to go down into that apartment after hearing shots and seeing Nova come out. Damn it, how did he know Nova didn't have some

boys down there? No, he'd never have gotten that gun. He'd never have tried to go up against Nova without muscle behind him. Am I getting interesting?"

"You got a good imagination."

"Nuts," Shayne said. "You got that gun, Dann. That's all that makes sense. You must have been tailing Nova for some reason, maybe, like you said, because the Organization was worried about him and the women. You saw him leave and knew he had been alone. You got the pistol. You spotted Coxie upstairs. I figure you went up and watched the rest of it and knew you had Randy good."

Shayne stopped to smile. Dann had begun to play with his pistol again. Shayne shifted a little in the chair, moved his suit coat away from where his hand rested on his right hip.

"Third, Virginia Phelps made a slip. You didn't arrange for her to come to me, but she did, which is why you started worrying about her. She told me that she didn't get jealous of Jenny Ruiz because Jenny was an old flame of Randy's, and she wasn't playing fair with Randy anyway. Only your Susan Roland told me that Jenny was a new chippie of Randy's. It makes a lot of difference to a woman if a guy plays with an old flame or picks up a new one."

"I never talked to the Phelps dame," Dann said.

"No, that part was all luck. Un-

til you got worried that Ginny Phelps might decide to save Randy's hide. She was the weak point in your frame. It was okay for a while, but after you sent Coxie in to tell his fairy tale, you knew Randy'd get worried, and maybe he'd start telling the truth. The cops wouldn't believe him, of course, unless the Phelps woman backed him up. So you had to keep her quiet—permanently. You handled that pretty damned smart."

"I'm a master mind," Dann said.

"No, you made too many mistakes. But the Phelps killing was nicely figured out. With Coxie's story, she was a witness against Randy—as long as she couldn't talk. So you got rid of her to shut her up, and made it look like Randy was the one who had shut her up. Neat. Everyone believed she was a witness against Randy, but you knew she was a witness who could blow your whole frame!"

"Using Mendy Garcia as the killer was pretty good, too. Only you slipped again. Mendy's a real pro, Dann, and he never goes on a job with identification. I know. He'd never go out to kill a witness for Randy wearing a monogrammed tie clip! That would be just too stupid. No, I figure you sent Mendy to kill Virginia Phelps all right, and you followed him. After he killed her you planted the piece of tie clip! Mendy's going to be pretty mad when he finds out how the cops fingered him."

"Mendy ain't going to find out, Shayne," Dann said, his hand now resting on his gun.

Shayne nodded. "Sure, that has to be figured, too. Mendy turns up dead pretty soon, and the cops find the gun that killed the Phelps dame. That closes the case on Randy, and leaves them with only an unsolved gang killing. They won't worry much about that."

Dann picked up his pistol.

"They ain't going to worry about a smart peeper being dead, neither."

"You won't shoot me here, Dann," Shayne said. "So I was right?"

"Maybe," Dann said. "Randy was asking for it. It just fell in my pocket, shamus, like a rotten tomato. I just had to rig it a little, Randy did the rest himself, the stupid jerk."

"I'll hand it to you, Dann. It took nerve to run a frame on Randy and on Mendy Garcia. You better be very certain you get Mendy cold."

Dann's smile was thin. "Mendy ain't so tough, and he don't know my boys are gunning for him. He'll be a pigeon."

Shayne heard the door open a fraction of a second before Dann did. The connecting door to Randy Nova's office. He went over out of the chair with his right hand already drawing the automatic from his belt behind his back.

Dann tried to shoot first.

The thin little racketeer almost made it.

Dann's shot came a fraction after Mendy Garcia had already fired.

Mendy stood in the doorway between Dann's office and Nova's office. His swarthy face was a mask of hate and fury. If Mendy had had any ideas of being clever they were gone. He shot Dann the second before Dann fired.

Dann went over as if slapped by a mammoth hand. Mendy didn't even blink as Dann's bullet struck splinters from the door frame over his head. Mendy stepped into the room. Joe Dann lay on his back behind his desk. His eyes were still open. Mendy leaned over the desk and shot Dann straight between the eyes.

It cost Mendy Garcia.

It had all happened in the fraction of a few seconds, and if Mendy had not shot Dann again he might have had time to deal with Shayne. By the time the swarthy killer remembered Shayne and swung his gun toward the detective, Shayne had his own automatic out.

He shot Mendy in the gun shoulder.

Mendy was flung against the wall, his gun falling to the floor. Mendy bounced off the wall and tried for the door. Shayne shot him in the leg and Mendy collapsed, knocked over by the heavy .45 slug.

Shayne was up and pressed his

back against the wall with his gun aimed at the door. The door burst open and three guns came in with gunmen behind them. They all stood and looked. Big Jeff staggered in after them and pushed to the front. His head was bleeding from a deep cut.

"Think fast," Shayne said. "Dann's dead. Mendy's through. I'll get two of you before you get me."

Jeff snarled, "You bast—"

"Smart!" Shayne snapped. "Be smart, Jeff. The boss is dead, Garcia's on his way to the rope, and Randy Nova comes back. Think good, Jeff!"

For a long ten seconds they all stood there. Below there was noise in the club as the waiters calmed the patrons. Jeff breathed heavily through his thick nostrils. Two of the men lowered their guns. The third watched Jeff.

Jeff glared once more at Mike Shayne. Then he spoke without looking at the men behind him. "Call the cops. Dann tried to frame Mr. Nova. Go on! Call the fuzz!" Shayne smiled.

XIX

PETER PAINTER bustled into his office where Roger Phelps and Mike Shayne sat waiting. He did not look Shayne in the eye. He sat down and rubbed his hands and looked away at the window.

"Open and shut," Painter said.



"The Roland girl admitted Dann sent her to you, Shayne. Mendy Garcia's gun checks out as the one that killed Mrs. Phelps. Big Jeff admits he picked up that tie clip and gave it to Dann. I figure he made the plant himself, but it doesn't matter now."

"What about Coxie?" Shayne said.

Painter flushed. "He'll go inside for a long time, that little perjurer. Accessory to murder and I'll make it stick! If I can't make that, I'll get concealing a felony."

"What's his true story?" Shayne said.

"Just like you said," Painter admitted. "He heard the shots and saw the woman leave and saw Nova leave. Only he didn't move out of his place and Joe Dann

brought the gun up and arranged it all. They both watched Randy bury the girl. The rest he played the way he said. Randy wanted that gun, so he came after you."

"That's what wasn't right all along," Shayne said. "Randy was covering for Mrs. Phelps or it didn't make sense. He loved the woman, so he tried to help her. After she killed Jenny Ruiz."

Painter looked at Phelps. "You knew your wife had killed that girl, Phelps. I'm going to get you too."

Shayne shook his head. "You'll never prove it, Painter. It has to be, of course. Phelps wouldn't have gone off the deep end for anyone but his wife. He knew she'd murdered Jenny Ruiz."

"And he'd have let Nova die for it!" Painter said.

Phelps looked at them. "Why not?" I hated him. He stole her and then he cheated on her. She couldn't take it. She went crazy and took her pistol and went to kill the Ruiz girl. She shot her in front of Nova. I'll give Nova credit; he tried to cover for her. When she

got home she was half insane. She told me the whole story. So I went out and got drunk and ended up with Jenks."

"Then Dann took over and tried to finish Randy," Shayne said. "With Randy playing right into his hands by covering for Mrs. Phelps. I guess you can get Nova, too, for concealing a murder."

Painter rubbed his hands. "We've got 'em all. Nova for hiding the body, Coxie for hiding evidence, Mendy Garcia for murder. The Organization'll be in trouble here for a while. I wish we could get Phelps, too."

Painter glared at the ravaged face of the drunk. Phelps only shrugged. Mike Shayne watched Roger Phelps.

"I think he's been gotten good, Painter. His wife's dead. If he'd told what he knew instead of getting drunk she'd maybe have gotten off with insanity and still be alive."

Phelps began to cry. He held his wasted face in his hands. Peter Painter and Mike Shayne watched him without any sympathy.



The ONLY MAGAZINE featuring MIKE SHAYNE every month



by
NANCY MacROBERTS

Which of his two friends had betrayed him? Only a wedding gift—and a man of God knew the answer.

GONE. It was evident in the figures, all right. It had been hidden in the books, right here in Hartman Investments in full view of the auditors and no one had suspected a thing. A \$125,000, embezzlement.

Jordan Hartman swallowed sickly. His heart felt as though he'd been stabbed.

It had to be either Lance Wells or Howard Peterson. And he had to face it that friendship, loyalty or

personal integrity were no part of a man he'd believed in. Which man, he wondered miserably, his brother-in-law or his best friend? Jordan Hartman thought of how he'd brought them both into the

small business his father had turned over to him fifteen years ago when he'd married Mary Wells.

He and Lance Wells and Howard Peterson had been kids together, friends through grade school, high school, college. They'd shared cars, clothes and girls—until he'd become aware of Mary. When he stepped into the company his father had begun, the boys came with him—scrapping for business, sharing overtime, bad breaks and the first big account cut three ways.

He'd given Lance and Howard access to funds so they could operate with the speed and freedom needed by a growing concern in a competitive world. Yet for fifteen years one of them had betrayed that trust, so cleverly that none of the auditors had questioned anything—and now, if they did, they would learn that Hartman Investments was a house of paper with not enough actual funds in the corporation to keep the wolves a snap away, once they scented the weak blood.

He would have to act fast. Knowing the men, he felt whoever had taken the money had it hidden away in a safety deposit or odd-name account, ready for quick escape. His chances of getting it back lay in not alarming the thief by accusing the wrong man.

Hartman was certain neither of the wives knew anything. Neither

Brenda Wells nor Eleanor Peterson would tolerate the disgrace; they and their children lived well enough without this embezzled wealth. So what if there was another woman? Which man was now cheating on his wife?

He became aware that his secretary, Miss Elliott, had been tapping at the door for some time. He'd given orders for her not to interrupt him: it must be something to do with Mary. He buzzed for her.

Miss Elliott entered. Glancing incuriously at the thin stack of papers which had occupied his morning, she said, "A Reverend Thurston to see you. He said he's just between trains."

"Not today." Hartman shook his head as if to clear it. "Give him a check for fifty dollars. No, wait, I'll give him one of my personal checks."

His hands were shaking in spite of himself as he reached into the drawer of his desk and pulled out the hard-backed blue checkbook that had bought so many luxuries in his thirty-nine years of living. It was one book that showed a true balance, thanks to Mary's integrity. But the balance wouldn't carry the family long, and it certainly wouldn't save Hartman Investments.

Why had he and Mary gone the suburban, country-club route, sending the kids to private schools, giving them riding lessons, ballet?

Hadn't it been Howard Peterson with a taste for brandy, smart people and flying who'd coaxed them out to Frosted Pines?

Hartman considered Howard's continuous fling: private lessons in Spanish with a black-eyed beauty teaching him and Eleanor. Was Howard expecting to leave the country with Maria? His new Cessna could cross an ocean, and he'd been checked out for an international license six months ago. But Howard always played big. Even as a kid, when they'd had allowances, Howard managed the polished air rifle by a combination of odd jobs, hand-outs from relatives and his charm turned on full for his mother.

What Howard wanted, Howard got without stealing. The rifle first, then the professional camera, the small racer, a foreign sports-car, his first plane. Howard played hard, all right, but his contacts paid off for all of them. Hartman couldn't picture a toy the grown Howard might want that he'd have to embezzle to get.

Jordan Hartman considered Lance Wells, Mary's brother, with a taste for Bourbon, beautiful models and art collecting. Lance's latest extravagance had been to underwrite the work of Charlotte Laventure, a French sculptress who gave lessons to Brenda so she, too, could turn out the wire fantasies that looked as though they came from a cluttered mind.

What if the embezzled money was already hidden in the paintings along the walls of Lance's modern box up the road from him and Mary? With Carlotta's complicity . . .

Because, unlike Eleanor or Mary, Brenda could drive a man to embezzle: always wanting something new, something wild, like the tweed walls on that den and the leopard-skin upholstery to set off her striking, extravagantly clothed model beauty.

She could make Lance turn to an easy-going, careless Charlotte who knew the French way of waiting on a man, had the French knack of sensing value and an artist's understanding of daily pleasure.

Physically indolent, Lance enjoyed watching horses, backing plays, buying stocks on margin— gambles that took money but paid off well with no extra effort on the lucky winner. Lance was the idea man of the group. Hartman couldn't picture him changing books patiently for years, waiting for a pay-off.

He liked a fast gamble, a few months at the most.

Who could the embezzler be?

Miss Elliott was saying, "Reverend Thurston doesn't want money. He just came by to thank you. He performed your marriage ceremony."

Old Reverend Thurston! How could he have forgotten that

name? "Send him in, Miss Elliott, at once," Hartman ordered, thinking, *of all the times for the old fellow to show up.*

When the minister entered, his unlined face glowing innocently beneath snow white hair, his clasp firm and strong, Jordan Hartman felt a twinge of envy.

"I was afraid a successful executive like you might not have time to see me," the old man began. "But I couldn't pass this way without inquiring about you and your dear wife—"

Hartman said, "She's still beautiful. We have two children now." He indicated them in the silver frame, thinking how happy they looked, how shocked they'd be when they learned the truth about Lance or Howard.

He didn't know which would hurt Mary most.

"I'll never forget your wedding." Reverend Thurston sank into the chair which Hartman held out for him, his eyes dreamy. "You and Howard Peterson and Lance Wells, three mischievous choir boys grown up, in the biggest wedding we ever had at Grace church. No comic books in the hymnals that day!"

Hearts and flowers, Hartman thought impatiently, while his inner mind cried *betrayal* and *embezzlement*.

"Your fee was the biggest I ever

made." Reverend Thurston smiled widely.

Jordan Hartman didn't doubt it: Grace church had a small congregation in a fading neighborhood. How hard it had been to give what he had, but he'd wanted to. Maybe because he wasn't a swinger like Lance or Howard, he felt he had to do one crazy, wild, extravagant thing in his life.

No, Hartman thought, not because of either Lance Wells or Howard Peterson: *I strained to give one big gift for all the goodness that was Mary.*

The old man was rambling away. "When your best man handed me that envelope, and I looked inside, I knew that Mrs. Thurston and I could pay off the old car. It was the only thing keeping us from taking that free month in a cottage so I could finish my book. Imagine two fifty dollar bills—a hundred dollars!"

Jordan Hartman felt his heart stop. Even as he spoke to the old man, he was buzzing Miss Elliott. He must not let the thief leave the building, to fly away with the sultry black eyes of Maria adoring the charming, selfish playboy who always wanted more.

"Reverend Thurston," Jordan said slowly. "That envelope I gave Howard Peterson as best man had *ten* fifty dollar bills in it: I'd paid you *five* hundred dollars."

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MURDER FROM INSIDE

"You've taken everything from me. My wife . . . my sons . . . my fortune. All perfectly legal. I haven't a thing left. All I can give you now is—death!"

by MICHAEL COLLINS



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"Crown cheated Tanner and got the wife?" Captain Dennis said.

"All legal," I said, "but shady. Tanner hated Crown."

"Three years is a long time to wait for revenge," MacKay said, scratching his head.

"He didn't wait. When I checked into it, following my hunch, I found that Tanner had been trying to ruin Crown for two years."

"But after three years, just for revenge?" The captain said.

"Revenge," I said, "and the in-

surance and Crown's business, and his ex-wife."

"You mean he figured the wife would go back to him after he murdered Crown?" MacKay said.

"Yes," I said. "She's a practical woman."

MacKay snorted. "All theory, Masters."

"Yes," I said, "all theory. But what else do we have? No clues, no evidence, no real facts. I had nothing to go on but my imagination."

From the moment the company hired me—Dave Masters, Private Investigator . . . Confidential—I had nothing but a hunch about Tanner. So I put myself in his place. I had to think the way Tanner thought. I became James Tanner. I was James Tanner, successful architect and bitter man, wrestling with his hate, facing his problem, deciding . . .

He, James Tanner, knew that he had to kill Max Crown if he was to get his wife and sons back. It had to be murder. He understood his ex-wife, dear Susan, very well. In the end she would go to the winner. A practical woman. Three years ago Max Crown had seemed like the winner. So she divorced him and married Max Crown.

That it had all been largely his own fault was the most difficult fact of all to face. But he had faced it.

He had thought of murder at once, of course. But three years ago he had ruled it out as too danger-

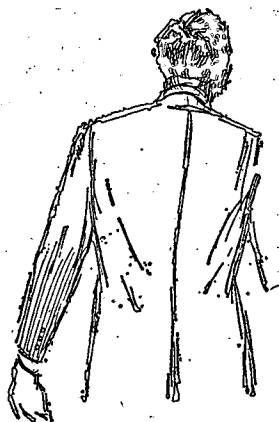
ous. While he had wanted to murder the man who had injured him so publicly, that fact itself made murder too great a risk. He would be the logical suspect. No, there were safer ways to defeat Crown and get his wife back.

Susan was so very practical. She considered her future most carefully. He had always admired that facet of her nature. He knew that it was the reason she had married him, Tanner, in the first place. Many men had wanted her, and he had been no more than a young architect in a large firm at the time. Susan had quickly convinced him to strike out on his own, had pushed him to success.

It made him proud even now to realize that Susan had expected his success from the start, and to know that he had not failed her. He had been the winner she wanted, each partnership bigger than the last, climbing over each successive partner to a better partner, until he had one of the largest architectural firms in the city. Until he had taken Max Crown as his junior.

Young Max Crown. He hated even the sound of the name. He, James Tanner, to be outwitted by Max Crown! That was more intolerable than the loss of his wife and sons, more intolerable even than the loss of the contract. To be beaten by a brash man not even thirty-five years old!

It did not make it any better to know that Crown could not have



stolen the Shea Development contract without help from Susan. He could not prove that, of course, but he saw her hand at work behind Crown. A simple maneuver, really, ridiculously simple, and when the legal smoke had cleared Max Crown had the Shea contract and his own company—*Maxwell Crown, Architects*.

Tanner groaned inside, tossed sleepless in his solitary bed, when he thought of that moment, and of the moment six months later when Max Crown also had his wife and his two sons. He felt his nails dig into the palms of his hands when he remembered that one year after that Crown had more business than Tanner & Sons. The buildings of the brash young thief in higher demand than his!

It was intolerable. Intolerable . . .

. . . intolerable! The frustration squirmed through Tanner's mind. The intolerable sense of defeat in-

side the mind of a man accustomed to success—a man who knew he was superior. I sensed that rage. I felt it inside me almost from the start.

THE CAPTAIN studied the report I had given him of Tanner's actions over the last two and a half years.

"Tanner took hold of himself," I said, "and began his fight against Crown. A good architect and a good businessman. He worked hard, plunged, took big financial risks. He did work for almost no profit just to get contracts. For a time he actually lost money, but he was ruining Crown. He had him on the ropes."

MacKay swore. "If he was ruining Crown, why suddenly switch to murder; Masters?"

"His sons," I said. "I think it was his sons. About three months ago his ex-wife, Susan Crown, came to visit his office."

I saw her, too, the woman. Susan Crown, once Susan Tanner. She was still young, still beautiful, there in Tanner's office. I imagined myself as Tanner behind the desk and looking at the woman he still wanted, who had appeared so unexpectedly.

Tanner smiled. "Face it, Susan, You've backed a loser after all. You made a mistake. Come back where you belong."

"I don't make mistakes, James," Susan said. "If you did succeed in ruining Max I would probably

come back to you. I admit that, freely, because it won't happen. I never back a loser, my dear, and you know that."

"We all make mistakes," Tanner said.

But his mind was wary. He heard the sudden lack of real confidence in his own voice. What did she know that he did not know? How could she be so sure? Or was it a bluff?

"I don't," Susan said, "but I won't argue the point further. I'm afraid that that is not what I came to talk about. I came to talk about the boys."

"The boys?" Tanner said.

"Max wants them to be ours, James," Susan said simply. "We have already started proceedings to adopt them legally. You'll be notified in a day or so, but I wanted to talk to you first. I think it best to avoid legal troubles if we can, don't you?"

"Adoption?" Tanner said. He was stunned. His boys? His sons? To be named *Crown*! The sons of James Tanner—to be named *Crown*?

"The court will back us, James," Susan said quietly. "The boys are so very young. Courts usually favor such a step when the children are so young, but we would prefer to have your permission."

Stunned as he was, Tanner managed to hide the shock behind a manner of light sarcasm.

"I'm sure you would, my dear."

"Then you'll sign the papers. Give Max the boys?"

Tanner smiled. He pretended to consider the idea, but his mind was racing. First his contract, then his wife and boys, and now his name! *Crown* to take his name from his sons, and, therefore, eventually his business and his future?

"I'll have to think, Susan," Tanner said. "I see your side of it, but they are my sons. I plan for them to inherit my work."

"It's not fair to them, James. They will soon wonder why they have one name and Max and I have another. I won't let that happen to them."

"I'll consider it, Susan," Tanner said.

But he would not consider it. His mind could not begin to consider it.

"Max can give them more than you can, James. You must know that by now. Max is going far, and my sons are going to be his sons. The court will see to that."

"I can provide for my own—" Tanner began to shout.

Susan stood up.

"Very well James," Susan said. She carefully pulled on her long gloves. "I won't argue. You really have no choice anyway. None. We'll get the boys in the end. You can do nothing."

Then she was gone.

Tanner sat alone in his office. The taste of ashes in his dry mouth. His sons. Susan was confident. Susan was sure of something. His

stomach sank. What had happened to Max Crown to make Susan so confident?

He checked his sources of information. The reports came to him three days later from men he paid to get such special information. It was true then. Max Crown was not ruined—was, in fact, moving upward again. Max Crown would get Tanner's sons.

No, Max Crown would not get his sons. No choice, Susan had said, but Susan was wrong. He had a choice. He would kill Max Crown. Kill . . .

. . . kill the man who had stolen from him as he had always really wanted to. I heard the whisper of that violent inner voice when I saw the reports from Tanner's informants, when I looked at the legal papers of the adoption proceedings. The voice of hate, of fury, of inner panic that whispered, "Kill Max Crown."

THERE WAS STILL a half an hour before the woman would be brought into Captain Dennis' office. I smoked.

"Tanner named his company Tanner & Sons almost as soon as the second boy was born," I said. "It was the adoption that triggered it. That and the failure of his plan to ruin Crown. I had to dig deep, but I located the reports he got about Crown after Susan's visit. Crown had been awarded the big Haskins Urban Redevelopment

Project. It was a plum. It would save Crown.

"Tanner had a man at Crown's bank he paid to tell him about Crown's finances. The man reported that Crown had floated a large loan, and had already advanced money to various suppliers. It looked like Crown was safe, and would get Tanner's sons."

MacKay paced the office. "Okay, he had motive. But he must have known he'd be the first man we'd suspect. He had to be nuts."

"Most killers are," I said. "But I think he knew he would be the first suspect, maybe the only one. He planned with that in mind."

The pattern was clear in my mind. I saw Tanner alone in his office working it all out as he would have worked out some problem in architecture. Careful, logical.

He knew that premeditated murder is almost always detected. Few murderers who plan to murder remain uncaught. Everyone knew that. And that was why they were caught!

A murderer was caught because he *knew* that murderers were so often caught.

The killer decided that he would have to be very clever. His plan would have to be foolproof. So he planned, complicated, made an intricate and devious scheme designed to turn away any hint of guilt. All dangers prevented, all suspicion diverted.

The would-be murderer, Tanner decided, attempted to hide his homicide by disguising it as something else. An accident, perhaps. A senseless killing by some insane night prowler. The panic-murder of a burglar. The unpremeditated work of a drunken hobo.

Sometimes the prospective killer worked out a meticulous plan to make the murder appear like death from natural causes. There were even many killers who planned to rely on a shaky verdict of suicide.

If this would-be murderer did not try to hide the murder, he agonized over schemes to hide his motive. He went to the most cunning deceptions to prevent the trail from leading to him. He planned on an unsolved murder! Stupidity relying on the police to give up eventually in the face of his cleverness. Or he laid false trails to lead the police to someone else.

He, the killer, was so aware of the danger of detection that he planned a crime so intricate and complicated that it was all but inevitable that he would be caught!

Tanner smiled when he thought of all this ingenious work doomed to failure. Doomed because it was so very ingenious. What a killer could devise, the police could detect. Yes, the more complicated the plan, the more open it was to detection. What a man could hide, another could find.

He, Tanner, would hide nothing. The answer was simplicity. A

simple murder—obviously and openly murder. One that pointed straight to himself, Tanner, as the murderer.

Because it was not enough for the police to know that a man had committed murder. It was necessary for them to prove it. Not that he wanted to commit murder, or that he could have committed murder, but that he actually had done it.

He, Tanner, would be the logical, even the only, suspect. He would have no alibi. Definitely no alibi.

The foolish iron-clad alibi. Because no alibi could be iron-clad since it was, in fact, only an alibi and not the truth. A simple error, even by some stranger, and the alibi was broken. Once broken, the alibi itself became damning evidence against the killer.

No, when Crown was dead, Tanner would smile and say, "Yes, officer, Max was certainly murdered. I often thought of killing Max. I'm glad he's dead. As a matter of fact, I was very near where he was killed at just the time it happened. It is my normal routine. I could have killed him, I suppose, but I didn't. Can you prove that I did?"

Finally he would not confess. That last and most fatal flaw in a killer's plan. The hurdle of conscience, the desire for expiation, the gnawing guilt that made a man break down under pressure to



cleanse his soul. His soul would feel no guilt, only a pure joy.

They would not trap him by the killer's need to have his crime known, and he would not break under questioning. He had been interrogated by the enemy during the war, and he was a man of position and money. He could protect himself.

He would not be forced to confess to save an innocent person. He would be the only real suspect. Susan would have an alibi, a real alibi, and the scene would be deserted.

Tanner planned, smiled . . .
 . . . smiled quietly to himself. *I was in his mind, felt his amusement as he, perhaps, thought of that old criminal adage: If you are innocent, take a judge for trial; If you are guilty, take a jury. A reasonable doubt and no proof and a good lawyer.*

CAPTAIN DENNIS chewed on his fingers, studied the file of the murder case.

"He just walked up to Crown as bold as you please?" the captain said as he looked up at me.

"It has to be," I said. "I've studied his actions for the whole time before the murder."

"No fingerprints," MacKay said. "No usable footprints, no bloodstains, no hair or skin under the fingernails, nothing dropped, no physical evidence. A thousand bricks like the murder weapon on the site. He walked past the place every Monday, Thursday, and Friday for months."

"Part of the plan," I said. "Those days Susan Crown had her alibi. Thursday was her Red Cross meeting, remember?"

"And Tanner planned it all like that?" Dennis said.

"Every simple little detail," I said. "He just walked into that building site and straight up to Crown inside the shell of the building."

The perfect site for a murder, I could almost hear Tanner thinking. I saw Tanner laughing as he walked past the site for the first time. Telling himself, perhaps, that he could not have selected a better site if he had told Crown just what he needed for a simple murder. And Crown, meticulous and careful, made a point of visiting his various buildings-in-progress after the day's work was finished.

The building site, Tanner noted, was in a downtown business area that was deserted after six o'clock.

It was hidden from view on three sides. The basement was already in, the walls just rising.

Tanner began to walk from his office to his own site by way of Crown's building. He smiled and nodded to people he passed. He bought a newspaper at the same stand each day. They would remember him, and yet would not really notice him near the site itself when the time came and he moved so as not to be seen.

Who really notices a plainly-dressed man strolling on a city street in the evening twilight? Who actually remembers the precise spot where they did see the man, or even the precise day, if he strolls often along that same city street? They would remember that he walked that way regularly, and would forget the exact day or time they had last seen him.

He chose a drugstore not far from Crown's site, where he stopped regularly for a soda. He talked to the counter boy.

"You make a good cherry soda, young man."

The boy grinned. "Thank you, sir."

"Tanner," he said. "Mr. Tanner. You look like a smart boy. You should better yourself. Ever think of architecture?"

"I like buildings," the boy said.

"Good. So do I. I'm on my way to one of mine now. And I pass some of the competition. An ex-partner of mine, Max Crown, has a

building a few blocks away. I usually stop there."

He tipped too much.

"Thank you, sir."

The boy would certainly remember him.

He made some small purchase before or after his soda. He browsed among the drug store's book racks. The browsing was so that the owner would remember him, too, and the small purchases served two purposes. First, they prolonged his involvement in the store, and increased the chance of being recalled later as a regular. Second, it helped his innocent appearance. Who buys a bottle of aspirin, or a tube of toothpaste, on his way to kill?

He talked to the boy about Max Crown each time. "You go and look at Crown's building, boy. Three blocks straight up on this side of the street. His name is on the sign."

He talked a lot about Crown. That would look good. Why would a man who planned to kill Crown talk so much about his victim to a stranger who would remember? It would seem innocent.

He brought the boy some books. "Read them. They'll help."

"I was real good at math," the boy said eagerly.

"That's important," Tanner said, encouraged.

At the actual building site he stopped whenever Crown was there. The other men noticed him. He made sure they did.

"Go away, Tanner," Crown said. "We talk in court."

"I like to study your cheap work."

"Stay away from me. You can't hurt me."

"I walk where I please," Tanner said.

He usually passed just at twilight. Sometimes Crown was there, and sometimes not. Most of the time he had to wait for Crown to drive up in his car from one of his other sites. Usually, Crown was not alone, but a few times he was. Tanner smiled.

Early in July he was ready. Twice Crown was alone at the site in the late twilight. The first time a group of boys would not leave the site although Crown tried to chase them. The second time Tanner was sure it was the moment.

When he walked up, Crown was along inside the unfinished shell, out of sight of the street. Tanner moved quickly to the open doorway. He was about to bend for the brick when Crown emerged from the building.

Crown was the bigger man. Tanner could not attack when Crown was facing him in the open. Tanner smiled, talked to Crown for a moment, and then walked away casually as usual.

He calmed himself. He had to wait . . .

. . . wait for the exact right moment. I heard Tanner in my mind, saying it over and over: be

patient . . . wait. Haste, that is the danger now, I imagined him saying day after day. Slow and careful, don't panic, don't hurry it, and there will be no mistake.

IN MY REPORT on Captain Dennis' desk were all the weeks I had spent checking Tanner's route.

"He could have gone by other streets," I said. "He could have driven. But he was a known walker and the route was logical enough. He talked to Crown. Casual and hiding nothing."

MacKay nodded. "A reasonable doubt. A jury would buy it."

"They all certainly remember him," I said.

"But they can't swear to any special day," the captain said, "and not one person saw him with Crown."

"He planned it pretty damned good," I said.

"Just walked right up to that building and Crown," MacKay said.

I imagined that last day again. Tanner a trifle eager. Time was pressing him. Would today be the day? And I felt the thin threads of haste Tanner had to fight. Routine. Stick to the slow routine.

Tanner dressed in the cheap suit, checked the buttons to be sure they were secure. His fingernails were cut to the quick, he wore no jewelry. He had washed his hair each day, and removed all labels from his clothes. He carried no ob-

jects that could be dropped, not even his cigarettes and matches. He walked from his office.

In the drug store he browsed, bought a new razor, and had his cherry ice cream soda. He talked to the counter boy about the books he had lent the boy. That he thought was a specially good touch. A smart lawyer would make much of the books, with his name in them, as a sign of innocence of murder plans.

When he was ready to pay, a group of noisy juveniles came in and engaged the counter boy with multiple orders. He was held up a few minutes. Nothing serious, but he did not loiter to talk to the owner when he paid his check this time.

In the street he walked a little faster. He bought his newspaper, and continued on briskly toward the site. Fast, but not too fast so as to attract attention. It was just dusk when he reached the site.

The street was deserted, the other buildings dark, and the twilight gloomy. The site was silent and empty. Tanner stood back in the shadows and waited. His plan did not allow more than a five minute wait if unseen.

There was a minute to go when the car drove up. Max Crown stepped from the car. Tanner tensed, ready to walk to the empty building. Crown leaned into the car for a second to speak to someone.

Tanner's heart jumped. The car was Susan's car. She was dropping Crown off on her way to the Red

Cross meeting. Which meant that even Crown's car was not on the street to attract attention.

Crown walked away from the car toward the partly-finished building. Susan drove away around the next corner. The street was empty. It was just that stage of dusk when it was harder to see than full night. For an instant, no one was in sight anywhere.

Tanner followed Crown across the debris of the site. As he neared his enemy he slowed, became casual. He let a small smile play across his face. Crown heard him, turned around.

"Don't you ever give up?" Crown said.

"No, Max, never," Tanner said.

"You're beaten, Tanner," Max Crown said. "The courts will back us. Go away."

Crown turned away with a gesture of contempt and walked into the dark interior of the half-finished building. Hate surged through Tanner.

He looked around once more, carefully. At this instant he was totally alone in the night, and all but invisible in the dim dusk light. He stepped to the open door-frame where Crown had gone into the shell.

He bent for the brick, and stepped into the hidden interior of the shell. Brick in hand, he looked for Max Crown. He heard a sound and turned.

Max Crown struck viciously.

The brick in Crown's hand smashed down . . .

. . . smashed against Tanner's head. I saw the shock, fear, surprise on James Tanner's face as Max Crown struck him down with the brick. I imagined the one moment of sheer agony when James Tanner realized that he was not the hunter after all, but the hunted. A bitter few seconds before Tanner died.



WE WERE SITTING in Captain Dennis' office. "The only way they could have gotten him there alone like that was if he was planning to kill Crown," I said. "That was *their* plan. Crown and the women set it up to kill Tanner. He walked in like a sheep to the slaughter."

"And Crown was waiting," the captain said. "Hit Tanner once with the brick, covered him with a canvas tarpaulin, and hit him four more times. No blood except under the canvas. No clues. No evidence—except Tanner's one mistake, which isn't much."

MacKay swore. "There couldn't be evidence, they were both stripped clean of everything!"

I nodded. "That was what started me on my hunch about Tanner. The way he had nothing in his pockets—not even cigarettes, and he was a smoker. That, and the way he just walked in to be killed. With Tanner the victim, those things made no sense. But if Tanner were the killer, they would make sense.

I began to think about how two people like Crown and Susan Crown would go about planning a perfect murder."

I had imagined myself in Tanner's mind all along, and now I imagined the scene between Crown and Susan Crown. I did some deep checking into what had made James Tanner decide on murder. It was there, all there. Clear as crystal, the plan of Max and Susan Crown.

"He's going to ruin me, Susan," Crown said.

"I like a winner, Max," Susan Crown said.

"I'll kill him before I let you go back to him!"

"All right," Susan said, "let's plan it."

Max Crown blinked. "Plan? How can we kill him? The police would guess at once it was me. The way he's ruining me."

"But they would have to prove it, Max," the woman said, smiled. "Make it simple, obvious. Make James come to you where you're

alone together and there is no evidence."

"Why would he come to me?" Crown said.

"To kill you," the woman said simply.

"He doesn't have to kill me. He's got me ruined."

"We make him think you're not ruined, and we make him have to kill you soon. We threaten to really hurt him."

"What could we do to hurt him that much?" Crown said.

Susan smiled. "The boys, Max. We'll adopt his sons!"

Crown stared at her, began to laugh. "The boys!"

"If there is one thing that would make James commit murder," the woman said, "it's the fear of losing his sons. Of them not having his name."

"Yes," Crown said, "but what about my business? It won't work unless he thinks he can't ruin me."

"You've been invited to bid on the Haskins Project. Make your bid so low they must give it to you. They don't reveal details of a bid."

"A bid low enough would lose me a fortune, Susan. I'd be ruined for keeps," Crown protested.

"Not with James dead," the woman said. "A calculated risk, Max. With James dead we would get his insurance, or the boys would, and that means me. The business would go to the boys, too. We'd have it all, and you could take the Haskins loss."

"I'd need money, a loan, to start work and make it look good."

"I have my jewels. We'll get a loan on my jewels. James will check and find that you have the contract and the money. With the adoption threat, he'll try to kill you."

They smiled to each other, Tanner's ex-wife and his most hated enemy. They began their plan, and they watched it work. They observed Tanner closely, made sure that Tanner could not make his move until they were ready. They decided on a Thursday, the nights of Susan Crown's Red Cross meetings.

"I've timed it, Max," the woman said. "If I drive from the house to the Red Cross faster than normal, or slower than normal, there is only a difference of five minutes. If you kill him in five minutes or less, we're safe."

Max Crown agreed. "No jury is going to convict on a matter of five minutes that could have been heavy traffic. Not without stronger proof."

"As long as no one sees you with James, you're safe. Even if someone saw the car, it would be just an unidentified car on a dark street for a few moments. It could be any car. You see, Max, they'll *know* you killed him, but they won't be able to prove it."

That Thursday Crown volunteered to work at the Red Cross himself. He told his men that he would not visit the site that night.

He told them to knock-off at the regular time without waiting for him. The site would be empty.

They went to the site. The woman dropped him off. Tanner came. Crown killed him. Susan came around the block with the car. A minute after she returned, Crown ran from the deserted building to the car. Susan drove off. Crown looked at the car clock.

"Four minutes flat."

They arrived at the Red Cross meeting exactly at the usual time—and they had left the house at the usual time. As they worked at the Red Cross, they smiled to each other.

... I saw them smile. Still smiling inside when the police came the next morning. Tanner had been found dead. They were shocked, horrified, although they admitted that they had hated Tanner for what he was doing to them. They admitted they would have wanted him dead. Sure that they had made no mistakes.

CAPTAIN DENNIS sighed. "And they didn't make a mistake. We've got no direct evidence against them."

"No one else could have done it," MacKay said.

"Or anyone else," the captain said. "It was so simple, anyone could have done it. A tramp, a drunk, a scared kid, a psycho. Some enemy of Tanner's we don't even know exists. Crown's lawyer

will make hash of us with a jury."

"Except for Tanner's mistake," I said. "With that, and all the circumstances I've dug up, we'll get them."

"It's pretty thin, Masters," the captain said.

"Thin and theory," MacKay said.

"But enough, I think," I said. "Enough for the woman."

They said nothing, Captain Dennis and Lieutenant MacKay. They were not convinced. Neither was I, really, but it was all I had. It had been a long, hard case.

All I had was theory, circumstances, one mistake, and my judgment.

"It's funny," I said, "Tanner had a perfect plan, without a flaw. But the plan of Crown and the woman had one flaw—the alibi. They had to have an alibi.

"And Crown and the woman made no mistakes, not one. But Tanner did make a mistake. It's ironic, isn't it? Because their plan had a flaw, and Tanner made a mistake, they're caught."

How do you explain one small error in a perfect plan? Tanner's plan. What made that one careless moment? The growing tension? A faint doubt in his mind that made him anxious, made him hurry that last night? I imagined myself as Tanner, and I had no answer. Maybe it was only fate, chance, working on that last Thursday.

The boy stood in his white uni-

form behind the soda fountain counter. A small boy, alert.

"Dead?" the boy said. "Mr. Tanner is dead?"

"Murdered," I said. "It was in the papers."

"I didn't see it," the boy said. "I liked him."

"Two weeks ago Thursday," I said.

The boy blinked at me. "Two weeks? Thursday? Gee, maybe that's why I couldn't find him. It was two weeks ago Thursday."

"Find him?" I said.

"He forgot the razor he bought," the boy said. "We had a crowd, and he had to wait to pay. He walked out fast and forgot to take the razor. He was gone maybe five minutes when I saw the package. The boss he let me go after Mr. Tanner. I mean, I liked him, so the boss took over on the fountain and said I could go and try to catch Mr. Tanner."

"You went after him?"

"I knew which way he walked 'cause he talked about this building of a guy named Crown. I figured I'd catch him if he stopped there again. Only no one was there when I got there."

"You went to Crown's building site, but you didn't see anyone?"

"I saw a big guy come out of that building place and get into a car, only it wasn't Mr. Tanner. There was a woman in the car."

"You saw a big man?" I said, "Can you identify him?"

The boy shook his head. "It was dark. The car was only there a minute. The woman got out and walked around to hold the door for the big guy. They drove off quick."

"That's all you saw?" I said. "Damn!"

"Yeah, except that the big guy had a grey suit on, and the woman had a green dress and real dark hair kind of long, and the car was a blue '66 Buick four-door."

I think I stared. "You saw all that? In the dark?"

The boy nodded. "When that woman got out of the car I looked close 'cause it might of been Mr. Tanner. Only she walked around the front in the headlights and I saw it was a woman. I mean, I looked close 'cause I was looking for Mr. Tanner."

... The boy had looked close because he wanted to give a package to a man who had been nice to him. A forgotten razor...

"I guess Tanner didn't need the razor," I said. "He forgot. He was held up, and he just forgot the package."

"It's not much," MacKay said. "The boy can't identify them."

"It's enough," I said. "He saw a dark-haired woman in a green dress. That was what Susan Crown was wearing. The description of the man fits Crown that night. The woman's car is a blue, 1966 Buick. She walked in her own headlight beams, so the kid saw!"

"You know how many blue

1966 Buicks there are in the city?" MacKay said.

"With what I dug up on their plan, and the motive, it'll probably convince a jury," I said.

"Probably?" Captain Dennis said.

"Probably is all we'll need," I said.

The inter-office telephone rang suddenly in the silent office. Dennis answered. He listened, and then told them to bring the woman in.

"She's here," the captain said.

Susan Crown, formally Susan Tanner, stepped into the room. She was a fine-looking woman. Still young and close to beautiful. Her cold eyes looked at each of us in turn.

"Sit down, Mrs. Crown," Captain Dennis said.

She sat down. "Am I under arrest for something, Captain?"

"No," Dennis said. "Not yet. But Mr. Masters here has a story to tell you."

Her eyes flickered toward me. Her lips curled faintly. She did not think much of me. My suit hadn't cost five-hundred dollars.

I told my story. From my hunch about Tanner, through what I had dug up on their plan, to the soda fountain boy. She listened. Her eyes showed nothing until the soda fountain boy. She blinked.

I nodded to Captain Dennis, and looked at Susan Crown. "Tanner's

company, which hired me, will do everything it can to convict you, Mrs. Crown. Since you didn't kill Tanner yourself, the captain can offer you a deal if you turn state witness. Maybe five-to-ten years. With parole you'll be out in five or less. If you stand up in court with Crown you could get life with no parole."

I waited. The woman watched all of us one by one. Her face showed nothing, but she had to go for the deal. I was going on my judgment, on my experience, and on what I had learned all along in this case about Susan Crown.

With both Tanner and Crown out of the way her sons would be rich boys. She was a smart woman, she would get her share. In prison for life, what good would the money do her? What I had uncovered might not convince a jury, she might get off. On the other hand my evidence might convict her. Maybe a fifty-fifty chance, no better, but I figured that those odds would be good enough. They were.

"Charge me first. I'll plead guilty," Susan Crown said without a trace of emotion. "Then I'll tell you all about how Max killed him."

I sat back in my chair. I guess I smiled just a little. The case had been all a matter of understanding the people in it. Susan Crown, formerly Susan Tanner, would confess all the way now.

She was a practical woman.

ABSOLUTELY, MR. MARKO— POSITIVELY, MR. SMITH

by EDWARD Y. BREESE

*The man said, "If you give the book to me
maybe the broad will stay alive. As for
you—" He grinned. I knew what he meant...*

TWO HOURS AFTER Ann's plane took off for Europe I had a room in the tower of the St. Maurice Hotel on Miami Beach.

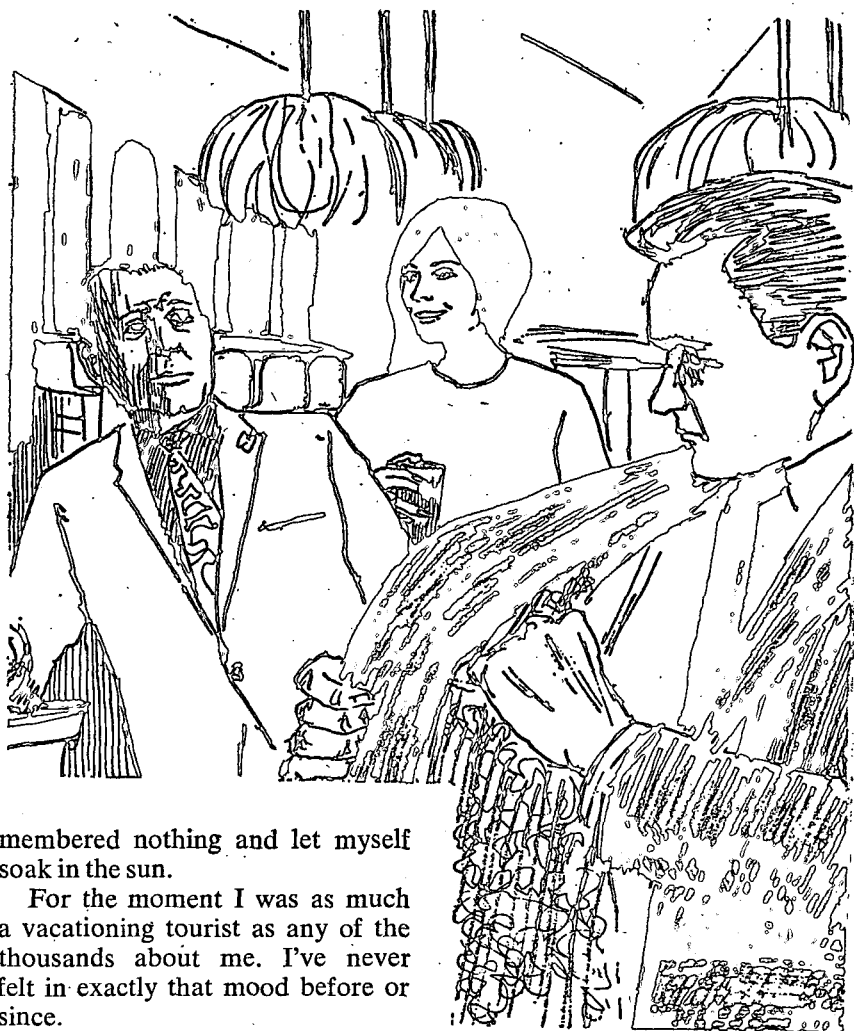
From my windows I could look out to the dark river that was the Gulf Stream pushing north. I could look up and down the six-mile line of pink and gold and ivory towers that was Hotel Row. I could wonder why the narrow beach was empty while the big hotel pools seethed with humanity like giant bowls of minestrone in the sun.

For the first time in years Johnny Hawk sat high and looked down at the world. For the first time in

longer than I could remember Johnny Hawk wasn't in a hurry. I was neither running from anything or to anything.

I planned to just take it easy for awhile. I meant to keep my feet in sixty dollar alligator shoes, go to the track and feed myself with a golden spoon.

I managed to do just that for seven days. I went to the races and swam in the surf. I gambled a little and won. I rented a cruiser and explored the dark canals past \$100,000 homes. I hired a charter boat and landed a medium-sized sailfish. I planned nothing and re-



membered nothing and let myself soak in the sun.

For the moment I was as much a vacationing tourist as any of the thousands about me. I've never felt in exactly that mood before or since.

It was too good to last. Of course it was too good to last. But I'm glad I have it to look back to.

It ended the afternoon I came back to my room to dress for dinner and found the door unlocked. I always locked it when I left.

When my key slipped easily instead of fighting the bolt, I knew. In a split second I knew Johnny Tourist was dead and it was time to be Johnny Hawk again.

I wasn't wearing a gun, but I had a switch-blade that opened to a four-inch, razor sharp stiletto. I palmed it in my right hand, closed. The blade would come out like a viper's tongue, if I willed it.

I opened the door with my left hand, pushed it to swing clean back against the wall. Nobody could have hidden behind it.

He wasn't trying to hide there or anywhere else.

"Come on in, Johnny," he said, "and relax. If that's a shiv, put it away. This is only a social call."

At first I didn't recognize him. He was in the easy chair over by the window, relaxed and with his legs stretched out.

Even sitting down he was big. He was flat-faced and red-necked, and his skin was weathered coarse. He had dirty finger nails and a \$200 vicuna sports jacket tailored loose to hide the gun under his arm. On his left wrist he wore a heavy Mexican-silver bracelet set with turquoise and Alexandrite. That's how I finally recognized him.

"Deputy Ben," I said. "How's things in Brownsville, Texas?" He'd been a deputy on the border, known as a thief and a Mex-killer till his bosses finally caught up with him. That bracelet was one of his little foibles. In a rough and tumble he'd take a back-hand swipe with his left and use it to tear up a man's face.

"You've got no score with me," I said.

"No score," he confirmed. "Mr. Marko sent me. I'm working for him these days."

Marko was a big name in any man's mouth. He was high, very high, on the syndicate totem pole. He was vice and gambling and thirty kinds of organized evil. He was big, big money and sudden death.

He was also the man who'd bought Phil Panama's record book—the book that had names and dates and details to blackmail almost half the financial and political big-wheels in the country. Phil "The Fixer" had kept notes all his life and he'd been mixed into most of the corruption of three decades. Whoever held that book held the lives and fortunes of hundreds of men.

For the past seven days Mr. Marko had had the book. He'd paid Phil's widow a million dollars cash to buy it. I'd been Ann Panama's bodyguard when the deal was made.

To know why a notebook was worth a million dollars to a man like Mr. Marko, it was first of all necessary to know who Phil Panama had been. They called him "The Fixer" or The Brain."

He wasn't big or tough, but he was smart. His knowledge of psychology was immense. He could find the spark of evil in a man and tune and play it like a violin. If there was any way a man might be corrupted, Phil could find and use it.

He sold that talent of his to the syndicate. He schemed and planned and made the contacts. He was diplomat in chief in the negotiations with rival mobs. He was ambassador at large and lobbyist without peer when a political fix had to be made. He was the "insider" who knew all the threads of the spider web of corruption.

For thirty years he schemed and plotted and kept the records. The syndicate trusted Phil Panama, and he never double-crossed them. He sold his brains for a very high price, but as long as he lived he was loyal to his employers.

When he died he left *The Book*. It was his set of notes, and every paragraph held the life and reputation of a rich and powerful man in business or in politics. It had the names and dates and figures. It listed the weakness of each man and the skeleton in each closet.

He left it for his widow to sell, knowing well that there would be plenty willing to buy. Why shouldn't there be? To the blackmailer, the fixer, the vice lord, the politician, that book could be worth more than the Comstock Lode or the Pretoria diamond reef.

"What does Mr. Marko want?" I said. "I was just a hired hand in the Phil Panama deal."

"I said to relax, Johnny. Mr. Marko's got no score with you either. He just wants to talk to you. He just wants, like they say on TV, the facts."

"Suppose I don't have the facts? I told you I was just a hired hand, Ben. I never saw the damned book myself."

"Nobody said you read it. It's not that sort of facts. Just he hopes you know some things. Anyway he said bring you. You want to come the easy way."

"The easy way suits me very well," I said.

"Then pack a bag. We're going by private plane."

I packed all my stuff. One bag to go and the other to leave with the hotel to store. I left most of my money in the hotel safe too, but I put about \$4,500 in small bills in a money belt. You never know. I might need it in a hurry, and that amount wouldn't tempt the likes of Marko.

Ben would cut my throat for a sawbuck, but I wasn't afraid of Ben. I packed one of my guns to go and one to stay, and put my .44 derringer in a sleeve rig.

Half an hour later a hard-faced pilot lifted us off the Lauderdale Airport runway in a fast two-engine private job. Like I'd expected, we went due East out over the Gulf Stream. Marko had a private island, one of the outer Bahamas. He paid his taxes, and club dues, so-to-speak, over there and walked very softly. He stayed on his own island and bothered nobody.

Accordingly the island police left him alone. The island was pri-

vate and off the beaten track. Strangers never went near it. It was quiet and easy to guard.

When the plane circled to come in over the private, coral rock landing strip I saw what almost amounted to a complete town shining in the sun below me. There was a big house, like a white concrete castle, and the dazzle of an oversized swimming pool. The big house and guest houses were walled. There was what looked like a small warehouse and a barracks for the working stiff and a dozen odd buildings. Then there was a dock with a couple of fishing cruisers and a white yacht tied up—and the landing strip for the plane.

The whole island was only about two miles by half a mile. The highest point was less than fifteen feet above tide mark. The only cover was palms and ornamentals around the houses. A finger of deep water came up to the dock, but there were coral flats on all the other beaches. Anybody coming in would have to wade half a mile from where he beached his boat—except right at the dock. There were guard towers on the beaches, and the men in them had machine-guns.

Ben watched me case the place with amusement.

"Not even a crab crawls ashore without permission," he said. "Not even a gull flies over."

"When you're Mr. Marko," I

agreed, "you have it all your own way."

"Exactly, Johnny boy. That's how it is."

I thought of another island, the one they called The Rock in San Francisco Bay. This one could be a prison too, for all that it was privately run. I felt a chill along my spine.

Once the plane set down we wasted no time at all. Ben commandeered a jeep at the landing strip and drove me straight to the big house. A guard checked us through the gate.

Once inside the gate we might have been at one of the smaller and more expensive Miami Beach hotels. Men and women in expensive sports outfits lounged around the pool and under the palms. Soft-footed servants carried silver trays of food and drink. The sun was bright and hot and a small, but very good, dance band was playing softly in a shaded alcove.

The women were young and tanned and almost naked, whatever they wore. There wasn't an ugly or awkward girl in the lot. Some of the men were young and tough with square, short-fingered, fighters' hands and blue jaws.

I knew the type. They talked tough and obscene and ran forever scared of each other. They hated the world—and themselves most of all. These were Mr. Marko's boys and girls.

A few of the men were older,

Mr. Marko's friends. These, and not the tough young hoods, were the ones I really needed to watch. They were barbered and trimmed and manicured. Their white heads were patriarchal. They looked out of heavy-lidded eyes like buzzards waiting for the world to die.



We crossed the walled court to the heavy bronze door of the big house. I'd seen that door before, pictured in an expensive book of art photographs. It was a famous door from a Renaissance banker's palace in Firenze. There was a guard here too, but this one wore a servant's short jacket. His weapons, like the fangs of the benevolent old men around the pool, were well concealed.

The man spoke softly to Ben.

"He wants to see you now," the guard said. "He's in the private gambling room."

The halls and rooms we crossed were furnished with a king's ransom in European and Chinese antiques. Somebody with impeccable taste had been hired to do the job. This sort of thing couldn't be faked. Ben was as out of place on the beautiful China silk carpets as a dead pig would have been.

That set the tone of my whole stay on Marko's Key. I could never quite decide if I was walking around in a palace or a nightmare. It added up to a feeling that maybe nothing at all was quite real. Maybe the others felt it too without quite realizing that they did. It

would have helped account for much that happened.

Mr. Marko's gaming room was a miniature casino, a sort of compact Monte Carlo. There were tables for poker and black-jack, chemin de fer and dice. There were the same red velvet and gold braid hangings that I knew from the Cote d'Azure.

In the center of the big room a silent croupier spun the roulette wheel while Mr. Marko made his bets. I'd seen that one before in Vegas.

Mr. Marko wore a white silk suit and a pastel green shirt with diamond studs instead of buttons. His tie was a triumph of surrealist design in muted shades. He wore a heavy gold ring engraved with cabalistic letters and set with a bloodstone to keep off devils. He was just five feet tall and his skin was always faintly greasy. His black eyes were forever alert.

He was betting the wheel with gold and silver plated chips. He had nothing to win or lose here, of course. He was the house. But he had to have the illusion of the bet.

For his betting partner he had only a girl.

This one really surprised me. She was wrong for that island. She belonged with the furnishings and not the people, if you know what I mean. Instead of over-ripe, mammalian curves, her body had slim, graceful lines. Her dark eyes wore no makeup at all. Her face was young and alive rather than pretty.

She wore a tailored linen dress and low-heeled shoes and a single strand of small pearls.

Mr. Marko waved his manicured hand at Ben and the croupier.

"Get out," he said.

They went away.

I was surprised that the girl didn't go with them. Marko saw that and smiled.

"This is Ellen," he said. "She's from my public relations firm. She has brains where most of my people have only claws. She's valuable to me. This is Johnny Hawk, Ellen—the one I told you about."

She put out a small, firm hand to me.

"Hello, Johnny Hawk."

Marko laughed.

"Johnny isn't wearing a holster, Ellen," he said. "I'm sure Ben thinks he's not armed. What do you think?"

"I think he has something up his sleeve," she said, "but I'm sure he'd never use it on us."

I pulled up my right sleeve to

expose the derringer in its rig, and held it out to them.

"Keep it, Johnny Hawk," Marko told me. "I don't fear you. I just wanted you to know how smart she is."

He wanted me to know how smart he was, too. I knew that well enough. I waited for him to speak again.

"I didn't send for you just to play games, Hawk. You're smart enough yourself to know that, I'm pretty sure."

"I know that," I said. "I'm not sure what you want, Mr. Marko, but whatever it is I've no reason not to play square with you. I'm not crazy and not on anybody else's payroll right now."

He got the point. "Then you're on mine for now. Now listen close, Hawk. I know you were with Mrs. Panama the week she sold me certain information. You were close to her. I need to know something about a man who called me on radio-phone last night. You could perhaps tell me. Who is Mr. Smith?"

There it was—out in the open. This was the question I'd really expected. It had to be the question. I'd thought over all the possible answers on the plane trip over and decided that the best thing I could do was stick to the truth.

"I'm going to level with you, Mr. Marko," I said. "I'm honestly not sure who Mr. Smith is. Ann—Mrs. Panama—and I only saw him once.

I might make an educated guess, that's all."

"I think your guess might be valuable." It was the girl, Ellen, who spoke. "Suppose you tell us what you know about this man and then make your guess and tell us why you make it. It will help us to know how and why you think whatever you do."

"I'll do that," I said. "He came to see Mrs. Panama just a couple of days before the end. He wanted to buy the information she had. He wanted it badly enough to offer twice the sum you paid."

"Two million dollars! He wanted it all right. What did she say to him."

"She refused him," I said. "She told him he was too late. Once she'd accepted your bid, she wouldn't change her mind."

"Not even for a million dollars?" Ellen sounded incredulous.

Mr. Marko was more practical. "I would have had her killed. How bad did he want the book?"

"He said he was an agent for somebody else. He said they wanted it real bad."

"Agent for who?"

"I don't know," I said. "Mrs. Panama didn't know. If she'd had to make a guess, I think she'd have said it was for a government and not an individual. I think a foreign government. One of the big ones who hate this country. That leaves two choices. But, like I said, that would only be an educated guess.

Mr. Marko gave the roulette wheel a spin, but he didn't even watch the little ivory ball. He was thinking, and his face looked empty and older than sin.

"I think you got a good guess," he said finally. "A government—that would explain a lot of things. I've read Phil Panama's black book. A government could do a lot with that book. Yes. Yes. A government could do a lot to get it, too."

"You wouldn't let them have it?" This was the girl.

"You should know me better, Ellen," Marko said. "I give up nothing, if I can help it. Specially nothing I pay a million dollars for. But maybe I can't help it. Maybe I can't help it at all."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Mr. Smith is coming here to see me. Tomorrow. He wants that book. If I don't say yes, maybe he'll try to take it. I think perhaps that will be it."

He stood quietly for a minute and seemed to be thinking over what he'd just said. Then he spoke to the girl again. "If this Mr. Smith is an agent of an enemy power, that book could be worth more to him than a whole battery of guided missiles. Just think. There are government figures listed there. They could be pressured for information or for treasonous action. Any who refused could be discredited and ruined.

"There are heads of big compa-

nies who could be forced to sabotage war production—to slow up our technological progress. The government could have no secrets from the man who held that book. It would have little defense against the government which owned it. Me, I just want the book to make money. For an enemy it would be a weapon of war.”

“But,” she said, “this island is like a fort.”

Mr. Marko just looked at her, a little sadly.

I answered for him. “Governments don’t mind forts. There’s deep water close by. Maybe a submarine is out there now—or a couple of fishing trawlers full of men who aren’t fishermen. Even on the mainland governments have friends, agents, money to buy guns. Anytime a big government wants Mr. Marko it will get him.”

“That’s right,” Marko said. “You think these bums of mine would fight soldiers? You’re crazy. Back-shooters is what they are. If Smith has a government, he has money to buy them all one by one. He can buy my best friend. Nobody fights governments. A man like me tries to buy off governments. Those big ones I can’t buy.”

“Maybe you could buy Smith,” I suggested.

“Smith, yes—whoever is back of him, maybe. His government no! But it is Smith I deal with. What is he? Did he threaten Mrs. Panama?”

“No,” I said, “but I think it was because he knew she didn’t have the book with her. She said she didn’t, but he wouldn’t have believed just her word.”

Marko: “Yes?”

“She had Cleveland Charlie Miller for bodyguard before me. He disappeared. Just like that. He knew she didn’t have the book. I think Smith worked him over before he died.”

“You may be right,” Marko said. “That’s what I would have done. Well, then, I must deal with Smith. I must make the best deal I can. I think that is what I must do.”

“Oh, no!” the girl sounded desperate. “You can’t let him have that book if he’s a foreign agent.”

“You’re a patriot?” Marko sounded puzzled. “You work for me. You’re the daughter of my cousin and you work for me, and you talk like a patriot. After all I do for you—after how well you know me, you talk like that. You know better. My flag is a thousand dollar bill.”

“You shouldn’t have sent me to a good college,” she said. “I got taught things. Gambling, shake-downs, the rackets—all that is one thing. I’m not a baby. But giving that book to an enemy is something else.”

“What can I do?” he asked. With her he didn’t get angry.

“Burn the book. Say it was an accident.”

“God protect me from such an

accident! This Smith will kill me for it. Then what will my country do? Will it name a highway for me? Will it put me in the history books? Who cares what it will do? I, Marko, will be dead."

Marko nodded. "Perhaps it will not be too bad," he said. "I will sell



Smith the book, if I can. If I have to, I will give it to him. But what is the book really? It is nothing but the knowledge written in it. We will find a way to keep the knowledge. Yes, that's what we will do. That will be better than nothing. Two can use the same information. Smith wants power and information. I want only money. We both squeeze the men in the book. Maybe we both get what we want. At least I can try."

"How will you do that?" she asked.

"Easy enough. You have your camera here for the little, small pictures on the roll. You copy the book with your camera. Make a good copy. No, make two copies. Smith is smart. He will expect me to have a copy. I will let him bully

me out of it. The other copy you and Johnny here will take to Miami. I want you out of here anyway when Smith comes—just in case he wants to play rough. In case he doesn't want anyone to know he has the book."

"I understand," I said. I didn't really think the girl got the point, but I did. If Smith really had a large force right at hand, he might want to kill anyone who knew about him. To be safe a copy had to be taken off the island.

Mr. Marko nodded to me. "I thought you would. Besides I think maybe you're smarter than the hoods I have here. I can't trust any of them. I'm fond of this girl, very fond. She is like a daughter to me. I want her safe out of here."

"You can trust me for that," I said.

I meant it. He saw that. I knew that in his own way he would be grateful, but that wasn't why I did it. The girl was, somehow, out of place on the island. Besides I had thoughts of my own about the book.

Ellen—her full name was Mary Ellen Corsini—took me upstairs to a fully equipped photo lab. Mr. Marko followed shortly with the book itself. He left it with us and went away to prepare for Mr. Smith's visit.

It was an ordinary, medium sized, black leather loose-leaf notebook. There were sixty-four leaves, covered on both sides with names,

dates and notes. Some were typed, and others written in a fine, compact hand in blue ink. There were eighteen photos, mostly snapshots, stapled to the pages. I recognized one of them at first glance. It showed the D.A. of one of our largest States in a situation that would have made me a little sick even if I hadn't known who he was.

Ellen went right to work taking micro-film shots of both sides of the pages.

"I don't care what Uncle Arnold says," she told me. "He should never turn this over to enemies."

"We don't really know it's to an enemy," I reminded her.

"You know perfectly well it is," she said. "Turn the pages a little slower, please. Even if we weren't sure, we should do something about it. I'd burn this book right now, except it would probably get Uncle Arnold killed."

"It would certainly get him killed," I said. "Also it would get all of us tortured first to find out what we could remember about this. Besides, why do you care so much? You work here. It isn't as if you taught Sunday School."

"I deserved that, I suppose." She flushed. "Mostly I work in the New York office that does public relations for all of Uncle Arnold's legitimate companies. Of course we also try to create a good public image for some of his associates. I'm not really proud of that. If

you're wondering, I've never actually been in a racket myself."

"Thanks," I said. "I was wondering."

"I don't really blame you. I guess I really do know what he is. It's just that he's never been anything but good and kind to me."

"All the more reason why you shouldn't do anything to get him killed."

"I won't do that. But I still think there ought to be *something* we could do about this information. Our own government should have it some way. Then they could watch the men who could be pressured into treason."

I had my own ideas about what the government would do if suddenly handed the goods on a lot of very important people. I didn't think much would come of it. If they hadn't already cracked down on those people, they probably never would. But I had my own reasons for telling the girl as little as possible of what I was thinking. Instead, I considered her idea.

"That might do the trick. I'll tell you what—you make three copies of this thing, instead of just two. One you leave with Mr. Marko. The second you carry to give him, if we get through okay. I'll carry the third and later on you can do whatever seems best with it."

"Splendid," she said. "That way we have a chance to save the whole mess from blowing up. I've plenty of film here and plenty of time."

When she finished taking the pictures and putting the three rolls of film in plastic capsules I made her leave the lab while I hid the third copy in my own way.

"If you don't know where I have it, you can't give me away," I said.

"Of course. How clever. And while I'm out I'll hide my copy."

"You do that," I said, "but don't get too clever for your own good. Don't swallow it or anything. These characters are perfectly capable of cutting you open if they thought you had."

She looked genuinely shocked. "Do you think so? How awful. I suppose they would, though. Thanks for warning me."

I never stop being surprised. Here she'd been used to Marko all her life. She had a college education. She was a smart girl. Yet she still looked on this whole business as if it were some sort of game. The idea that foreign agents would really kill her to get the copy had just never entered her head. Most people are like that, though. It's the deciding edge they always give the really hard man. It's why he can usually do whatever he wants with them.

While she was gone I hid my capsule where I thought no agent would think to look.

By now it was after eleven o'clock at night. The sounds of drinking and carousing of Marko's "guests" were getting pretty loud in the patio and gambling room.

Ellen had a servant bring us food in one of the upstairs parlors. The steaks were prime meat.

"Uncle Arnold says Mr. Smith isn't due till tomorrow afternoon," she said. "We can get a little sleep and then take one of the fishing boats in the morning. He'll send some people out in the other boats at the same time to really fish. That way it will look more natural on the off chance anybody's watching."

"That's fine," I said.

I was pretty sure somebody would be watching. I remembered the cold, alive eyes of Mr. Smith. He'd have a cat to watch every rat hole. But I didn't want to alarm Ellen. The more natural she acted when the time came, the better it would be for both of us.

Shortly after that I was shown to a bedroom suite and locked in for the night. Mr. Marko wasn't any more trustful than Mr. Smith. It suited me. I needed to think. I wanted very much to get at least one of those micro-film copies safely to Florida, and I could see it wasn't going to be easy.

A deferential manservant woke me at five and, shortly after, took me to join Mr. Marko and Ellen in a small private breakfast room. Marko gave us our final instructions.

"You go out right away," he said. "You fish for a while. Then the skipper takes you to Miami. When you get there, call this

phone number. Memorize it. My lawyer tells you where to wait for me. Right?"

"Just one thing," I said. "When we're stopped on the way . . ."

He broke in. "Don't you mean *if* you're stopped."

"I've seen Mr. Smith. I said *when*."

Marko thought it over. "Hide the copy if you can. Don't risk Ellen's life by fighting unless you have to in order to protect her. She is the most important."

"Yes sir," I said. The old devil was more human than I'd given him credit for. I'd have bet anything in the world he'd have said to save the copy first.

The manservant came back and spoke softly to Marko. He got out of his chair. "Now, you go. Quickly. Our radar shows a plane coming in—still a long way off. I think Smith is early."

We almost bolted for the docks in the thin morning light. There were two fishing cruisers with outriggers, and the motors of both were idling. A party of four went to one boat, and Ellen and I to the other. I recognized the captain right off. He'd been a booze-runner in the old days, then a smuggler and China runner and god knows what else. He was called just Captain Mack.

He had a Haitian mate, a huge man with an easy grin and a gold ring in the lobe of his left ear. I'd seen him before too and I knew he

was dangerous. The grin was deceptive.

On the way to the dock I noticed Marko's hoods were up and dressed enough to hide their guns. There were double guards on the gates.

The diesels purred as we slid smoothly away from the dock for the long run out the channel. The black took a sliver-thin, razor sharp fish knife and commenced to fillet bait. The heavy rods were already rigged and in the sockets. At the end of the channel the other boat turned west towards Florida. We kept going just a trifle east of south.

Before the craft had run two miles we saw a plane coming in from the east for the island landing strip. It was a small seaplane, unarmed; the sort of plane that could be carried easily enough by a submarine or a "fishing" trawler. With wheels retracted it could be landed on water and then hoisted to a deck. I was relieved when it went on to the island without circling or, apparently, noticing us.

It was thirty minutes later, and we had our lines out, when the launch came over the horizon in a white V of foam. It was long and dead black and faster than anything I'd seen in a long time. An awning covered the cockpit and the five or six men who manned her. There was a heavy caliber machine-gun mounted near the stern:

"This is it," I told Ellen. To the

captain; "Heave to. They're faster than this tub."

He put our nose into the wind and kept the motor idling. I put my gun and the derringer from my sleeve rig on top of the bait locker in the cockpit. I made the mate get the captain's automatic and the shotgun out of the cabin and add them to the pile. Rather sheepishly, Ellen produced a nickel-plated .25 and put it with the rest.

The big launch came up on us fast and slid smoothly alongside. Three men with submachine "squirt" guns of a pattern new to me came over our rail. Two more had the big gun swung to cover us.

The leader of the boarding party had the clean cut, professional look of a naval lieutenant. All of them wore nondescript dungarees, and their launch was unmarked. At least the leader spoke English.

"I notice you have put down your weapons," he said. He'd spotted the pile on the locker right away. "That was wise of you. Stay right where you are. Then there will not be trouble."

He said something to his men in a language I don't speak. The three of them went to work searching the boat. They took it section by section with the easy efficiency of real professionals. After thirty minutes, finding nothing, they searched the captain, the mate, and me. It was a thorough job. They looked in my ears and tried to unscrew the mate's gold tooth.

Then it was Ellen's turn. They went at it just as thoroughly and impersonally. Of course they found the capsule where it had been sewed into a twist of her fishing shirttail. If they hadn't found it, I would have tipped them she had it on her. They had to find what they were after, or we'd never have been let go.

The other fishing cruiser had nothing to be found. It never came back. It just vanished and the crew and passengers with it. I'd have been sorry for them except they were all Marko's people to begin with. Naturally they were never reported missing.

As soon as the lieutenant, if that's what he was, saw what he had, he called the launch in close. One of his men went over to the pile of weapons on the bait locker. He examined my derringer curiously, said something, and picked it up. The leader yelled at him, and he dropped the gun.

"I'm sorry," the leader said in his almost-perfect English. "We are not thieves." Then he saw the humor of that and laughed. "At least not that kind of thieves. It is lucky we find what we want."

"Thanks," I said. "If I wasn't afraid you'd take it for an insult, I'd call you a gentleman."

He thought it over.

"No insult," he said seriously. Then they climbed back into their launch. One of the men on the launch took a small camera and

snapped some pictures of our cruiser and the four of us.

I didn't like that. I didn't like it one bit. So far everything had gone according to my plan. I hadn't thought about cameras. I was afraid of what would happen if Mr. Smith ever saw the pictures. The very thought made me sweat.

The launch swung off and was gone in an almost unbelievable burst of speed, going so fast it almost seemed to come right out of the water.

We watched them go. The big mate climbed up to the high seat by the auxiliary wheel used for cruising so the steersman could watch for fish. He shaded his eyes and watched the launch streak for the Eastern horizon.

Captain Mack beat me to the bait locker. He had the shotgun leveled at my middle before I could move.

"Number sixes," he said. "They'll take your stomach right out past your spine, smart boy."

Ellen went white as a sheet. "Stop that. Mr. Marko will—"

"I'm acting on his orders," he said. "He doesn't want you hurt, miss. So if you don't behave, I'll just kill Johnny here. You tell her, Johnny."

"He's probably telling the truth, Ellen," I said. "Marko may trust you, but certainly not me. He'd want his own ace in the sleeve. Right, captain?"

I was talking for time; trying to

think. I hadn't expected him to make his move so fast. The bait locker where the captain stood was in the stern. I had my back to the cabin wall. The mate was behind and above me, looking down. Ellen ahead of me to the right. Behind me, clipped to the wall, was a long gaff with a hook like a shepherd's crook and a fish knife. At least I thought I remembered a fish knife. I had to be right.

"Don't stall, Johnny," the captain said. "Mr. Marko figured you'd have an extra copy of that film hid out. I think he's right or you would have tried something a while ago. Just hand it over nice and easy, and we'll all go to Miami together."

"Don't get hurt, Johnny," Ellen said. "We were keeping it for him anyway."

"In that case," the captain put in, "Johnny won't mind. Will you, Johnny? Of course not. We can all be friends again. Just tell me where it is, Johnny. Or I'll just have to kill you. I'd rather not do that."

"I'm sure you wouldn't want to," I said, looking as thoughtful as I could. "Okay then. I'll do better than tell you, cap. I'll show you. Here."

He was just stupid enough, or sure enough, to let me reach behind my back instead of pulling the trigger. It was his only mistake. It just takes one.

The knife was where I remembered it. I threw it and fell forward

to the deck with one movement. A load of number six shot went over my head to punch through the cabin wall. The knife went through Mack's thin shirt and into his heart like an icepick into hot lard.

I heard the mate yell, behind and above me. I knew he was coming down on me and tried to roll clear. Even as I tried, I knew I'd never make it.



There was a blur of movement and a thud at my side. I heard Ellen scream and a fearful screech from the mate. Great gouts of blood fell onto my back and shoulders. The big man screamed an awful, bubbling scream and his body came down beside me.

Ellen had moved faster than I'd ever thought possible. She acted by pure instinct, grabbing one of the heavy tuna rods and planting the butt on the deck at my side with the tip aimed up at the diving man. That rod was made to hold a four-hundred pound tuna.

When he came down it didn't break. The heavy bronze ferule went through his soft belly, angling up through heart and lung,

to brush the spine on exit. He was dead before his body forced its way to rest on the big reel.

Ellen sat on the deck in a pool of blood and wept hysterically. I rolled free and sat up. There was nothing to say. It was all over.

I got the two bodies overside. I cleaned the deck as well as I could with buckets of salt water. Ellen and I both got shirts and slacks out of the skipper's personal locker. Our own clothes went overside. The big rod and reel were worth \$500 together, but they went over too. We each had a half tumbler of brandy from the boat's supply.

Only then did Ellen try to speak.

"I had to, Johnny," she said. "I never did anything like that before. I didn't think I could. But I just had to."

"Sure you did," I said. "He'd have killed me for sure—and most likely you too."

"Why did you have to start it, Johnny? Why? They'd just have given the film to Uncle Arnold."

"I'm sure," I said, "that the skipper had orders to kill me anyway. For holding out a copy. Maybe in case I'd read the book. You were safe enough, I think, but Marko would want me dead. Can't you see that?"

She thought it over. "Yesterday I'd have said Uncle Arnold wasn't like that. Now I don't know. I honestly don't."

I said, "I know. I have to know. The only way I stay alive is by

thinking ahead of everybody. I know too much for Mr. Marko. He'll kill me now if he ever gets close to me. You can believe that."

"Anyway, Johnny, you have the copy of Phil Panama's treasure."

"I wish I hadn't. It puts the mark of death on me. Marko will kill me because I have it. If Smith ever sees the photo his goon took, he'll remember me and know I've got it. Then he'll want to kill me too."

"Then," she said, "the only safe thing you can do is turn it over to our own government. That's what we should do anyway."

"Don't be naive, Ellen. It's not that easy. This stuff puts the finger on a lot of very important people. The only way I could turn it in would be by personal contact with somebody very big and very honest. Right now I don't even know who that is."

"Oh," in a small voice, "what do we do first, Johnny?"

"We're between a big hammer and a big anvil, baby doll. Except for Marko, you're in as much danger as I am. We do the only thing we can till I have time to think. We run for our lives. First I try to get us safe ashore."

"Oh, Johnny. I thought it would all be so easy."

"Nothing is easy, Ellen. Nothing at all."

"We've got to find a way," she said.

"We will," I said. "I gave you

the dark side of the picture first. We'll get this book to the man who's both big enough and honest enough to make the government use it, if we have to go to the President himself. The head of the FBI would do. Maybe one of the country's big newspapers. I wouldn't have started this caper in the first place unless I'd been sure it could be done."

She managed a smile. "I killed that man, Johnny. When we get the book to the right people, I won't have to feel like a murderer any more. I'll feel like a soldier instead."

"You're a soldier, Ellen," I told her. "A good soldier. Not all of them wear uniforms. You probably won't get a medal, but you should."

"We both should, Johnny."

"Not me, I should have my head examined. I've gotten away with a million dollar property, and I'm going to give it away. Not sell it—give it away."

"Why are you doing it?" she asked.

I thought it over. "I guess because I can't do anything else. I've known it all along, but just didn't want to admit it. I fought in Korea. Marko could use that book to blackmail people who more than deserved it. That's one thing. But Smith's government would use it as a weapon against all the innocent little people. I guess I can't let that happen, any more than you could."

After a long while she asked me, "Where is it, Johnny? How did you hide it where they couldn't find it?"

For the first time in two days I relaxed and really laughed.

"I'll tell you," I said. "I owe it to you for saving my life. It's in my derringer. There are two forty-four calibre rimfire cartridges. I pulled the bullet from one, threw away the powder and replaced it with the roll of micro-film. Then I put the bullet back in on top of it. In a final emergency I pull the trigger. The priming compound fires and burns up the film. Meanwhile nothing will find it short of breaking down the cartridge.

"I figured whoever stopped us would find your copy and think it was the only one we had. It wouldn't have fooled Smith, of course, but his man wasn't quite smart enough."

"Would Smith have found it?" she said.

"I don't know, but either he or Marko would have figured out I'd have it. You and I would be dead now and this boat sunk."

"I see," she said. "I feel better now, Johnny." She went into the cabin and lay down on one of the bunks.

The cruiser moved steadily towards the distant Florida coast.



Mike Shayne Leads Next Issue With—

DEATH TRAP

A New Complete Short Novel

by BRETT HALLIDAY

She had asked for few things in her life. Wealthy men to love her, money to keep her warm. But now she lay cold in death, as Mike Shayne for once defied a cardinal rule of gangland—"Never give a shamus an even break" to avenge the luckless lady of the night who had talked too much, too boldly—to a man whose answer was murder!

The depression years spawned many evils. But nothing like the blood-flecked partnership in murder of soft-voiced Clyde Barrow, the bank robber, and his incredibly lethal paramour, Bonnie Parker, the girl who lived to kill, and did it only too well.

You'll meet them in—

THE DEATH MERCHANTS: BONNIE PARKER and CLYDE BARROW

A TRUE Story of a Partnership Written in Blood

by DAVID MAZROFF

IT WAS MAY 23, 1934. Bonnie Parker was twenty-three years old. Clyde Barrow was twenty-four. It was the last day of life for these two strange, morally twisted, spiritually warped people who had dealt in hotly passionate violence for two long murderous years.

Dawn had come up slowly over the Louisiana tangle of forest just outside of Bienville Parish and bathed the dirt and gravel backroad with its pink-hued warmth. Minutes later the sun came into view over the horizon to the east.

It was too beautiful a morning to die, to die with your face blown

from your head, or to have your frail girl body torn full of holes from which poured little rivers of your life's blood.

The crushing end for Bonnie and Clyde was only a few moments away, their Ford sedan cannonballing them straight into the path of the constructed ambush. The car sped nearer and nearer, its roar synonymous with the dissonant sound of the machine guns soon to come.

Among the six men awaiting them was Captain Frank Hamer, of the Texas Rangers, a man who had killed some sixty law-breakers

Spawned of the depression, nurtured in the evil side streets of crime, a new breed of murder-mongers came into being with the twenties. Of them Bonnie Parker, the slim, hate-crazed killer girl and her fancy boy, Clyde Barrow, must be placed near the top of the list. But there were more—many more. Pretty Boy Floyd, the incredibly vicious John Dillinger, they killed and maimed and ravaged and wrote a bloody chapter in the annals of violent death. Famed crime writer David Mazroff will recreate for you some of these characters and tell you how they lived, loved and died. Watch for these big true feature stories in this magazine!



so far and who had trailed Bonnie and Clyde doggedly for a solid year, from Texas up through states piled with frozen wastes and into Canada, and then back to Texas, across Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri, and at last to Louisiana where cordons of sheriffs and deputies had harrassed them from one roadblock to another until now when the chase had set them on the final road.

A short hundred yards before the car was to shoot into the deadly ambush, Bonnie Parker shouted, "Clyde, stop the car! Turn back! There's something wrong!"

Instead, Clyde Barrow pressed down harder on the accelerator and the Ford leaped forward, faster, ever faster as if stung by a hateful fire.

"Nothin's wrong, Bonnie!" Clyde shouted back without taking his eyes from the road. "We're in the clear. We're gonna make it!"

"No!" she screamed from the back seat, and lifted the machine gun from her lap. "No! No! No!"

The last "No" never reached Clyde's senses.

BONNIE PARKER was born in the little town of Rowena, Texas in 1910, the only child of Hard-shell Baptists. She was bright, full of energy, a bouncing ball of a girl who liked to laugh. While yet a child, an uncle taught her to swear, and she would curse everyone, even her father, without really knowing

the meaning of the words she used, certainly not the four-letter words.

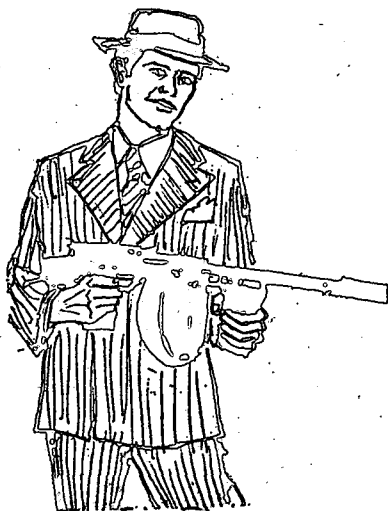
When she was five years old her father died and the family moved to Cement City, another small town just outside of Dallas, where her mother, a frail, thin woman, got a job and enrolled Bonnie in school.

As Bonnie grew older she began to show the signs of temper and viciousness that were to characterize her short life with Clyde Barrow. She would pick on girls and boys twice her size, call them by every filthy name she knew, throw rocks at them, and threaten them with a small knife which she carried stuck in a string tied around her waist under her dress.

She was emotionally unstable even then, cried at the slightest provocation, at sad movies, at other people's funerals, at the sight of dead jack-rabbits or birds. But sad movies were her favorites. She saw pictures like *Orphans of the Storm*, *The Scarlet Letter*, and *Camille* six or seven times, and always wept at the tragic lives of the heroines.

School records revealed that she was an excellent student, excelling in elocution and dramatics. Her ambition was to become a poetess and an actress, and she dramatized herself at every opportunity.

She left school at sixteen to take a job as a waitress in a cheap hash house in Cement City. The work, which included washing tables and



CLYDE

dishes besides waiting on customers, most of whom were rough-neck truck drivers and laborers, was hard and extremely boring to her.

She dreamed constantly of getting out of Cement City, out of Texas, and going to a big city like New York, where she could become a great actress. Her only form of relaxation and social life was in going to church picnics, box suppers, and an occasional movie.

When she was sixteen she met a footloose bum named Roy Thornton who made a big pitch for her.

"Honey, you're the sweetest gal in Texas. You're too pretty to be wasting your life in this dive. You marry me and we'll do some big things together."

"Yeah? Like what?" She was dubious of the line he was throw-

ing at her and suspicious of the hook that was fastened at the end of it. But, if he meant it, if he truly meant it, then it would be her way of getting out of Cement City.

"Like what, Honey? Well, travel, live high, wear fine clothes, live in the best hotels and eat in the finest restaurants."

"On what?" she asked cryptically. "You don't look like no money man to me. Look at you. You look like a farmhand who's lost his pitchfork."

Roy Thornton laughed good-humoredly. "This is my disguise, Honey. I got to dress like this to keep the Rangers from getting suspicious. I—" He bent his head and whispered to her so that the other diners wouldn't hear his words. "I'm kinda wanted by the Texas Rangers."

"Yeah? What for, stealing a wagon full of corn?"

He laughed again. "No, Honey. Stealing a small wagon full of money. I got it buried and am just waiting for things to cool off before I dig it up."

She wanted to believe him but felt in her heart that he was lying. "I think you're just shooting me a fat old line. Well, Mister, I'm not buying it."

"Okay," he replied, and slapped the counter. "I'll be back in a couple of days and prove it to you."

He was back in three days, waited for her to get off work, and when he was walking her home he

showed her a fistful of money. "How do you like this, Honey?"

She married him.

The money he showed her was the proceeds from a small robbery he had pulled off the day before.

He never delivered any of the things he had promised her. She had to keep on working to support herself because he disappeared for weeks at a time without telling her where he was going. Her life turned more drab than before and she was always lonely, irritable, and at sword's point with life.

In 1929, three years after her miserable failure of a marriage, Thornton drew a five-year sentence for robbery. She was fed up with marriage anyway and shed no tears for her husband's plight. She began to drink with some of the men she met, gave herself to a few, or many, in a "what-the-hell-does-it-matter" attitude.

At about this time she met Ray Hamilton, a boyish young man a year younger than she, but tough as spikes. He was handsome, always smiling, and always had a gun stuck in the belt of his trousers.

She fell for him. He suited her fine. He was small, under five and a half feet tall, and weighed no more than one-hundred and twenty pounds. They made a cute pair together unless you knew that Ray Hamilton would kill without warning and on the slightest provocation.

"I beat 293 years in the Hell Hole of Texas," Hamilton told her.

"The Hell Hole of Texas? What's that?"

"That's 'The Ham', baby. The Eastham Prison Farm. You know what them lousy shotgun riding screws do to you every morning? They crucify you. Yes, sir. Every morning. And twice on Sunday. You know something, baby? Before they get me back in that lousy joint they'll have to kill me. But not before I kill every one of them bastard screws I can."

Bonnie was thrilled. This boy wasn't a boy at all but a real man with guts. "Did you know my husband, Roy Thornton?"

"Roy Thornton? Sure. Baby, he's a nothin', strictly small time. How did you ever get hooked up with him?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "He told me a lot of lies and I believed him. He really was small time."

"Well, baby, you stick with me and you'll hit the big time."

"You ain't handing me a line now, are you? Like Roy did?"

"No, baby. No line."

He was true to his word. Young as he was, he was nonetheless an experienced gunman and robber. He executed robberies with lightning swiftness, one after another, and poured money into Bonnie's lap. Then, as the law of averages works, he was nabbed on a job and sent back to Eastham. The world fell apart for Bonnie.

She went back to work at the hash house. Only this time she spent more of her free hours in the speakeasies in Dallas, in the roughest sections of town.

She was sitting in one of the speakeasies one night, about three months after Hamilton was returned to Eastham, when a young man limped in, looked around the room, saw her sitting at a table alone and walked over, pulled out a chair and sat down.

"Hi," he said, and grinned. "My name's Clyde Barrow. What's yours?"

One of the strangest things in her life was the fact that thieves, gunmen, and murderers were attracted to her. It may have been that she was blond, tiny, curved, and with that insolent look young women have who know the facts of life and don't give a damn about the causes or results of the events which make them. Instinctively, she knew him for what he was.

She said, "I hear cops on motorcycles, whistles blowing from the tops of prison walls, and guns being fired. When did you run away from Eastham?"

Clyde Barrow didn't think that was funny. "You're pretty smart for a young gal, with all that talk. How come you know so much about it?"

"I got a husband in stir. And a boy friend. Roy Thornton and Ray Hamilton. You ever hear tell of them?"

"Nope. And don't care to." He scrutinized her for a long time. "You're pretty young for a husband and a boy friend."

"You're pretty young to have done time. What did you do?"

"I didn't say I did."

"It's written all over you, Mister Clyde Barrow. How come you limp? You don't appear to be a cripple."

"Well, if you must know, I had a friend chop off two of my toes with an axe. So I wouldn't have to work in them damn cotton fields."

"Did you have to work any way?"

"No. My pardon came through two days after my toes were chopped off."

"That was pretty dumb."

"You ain't no wise smart enough to know if it were dumb or not, see? You ain't been in no damn prison farm so you don't know."

She couldn't have pronounced the words if her life depended upon it, but she recognized the calculated arrogance of Clyde Barrow in her own language, in her own sense of evaluation.

"What do you want?" she asked suddenly. "Why did you come to my table?"

"I like the way you look. I think you and I could get along real nice together."

"Sure," she replied tauntingly. "You're fresh out of stir and want a girl and you think I'm the answer to it. Well, Mister Clyde Bar-

row, I ain't. See? So you can go peddle your papers."

He grinned back at her. "Listen, I ain't sore at what you said, so why should you be sore at what I said? I got thirty-six dollars. Let me buy you a drink."

"Then what?"

He grinned again. "That's up to you."

"You damn right, and don't forget it."

They drank for several hours and then Clyde induced her to go to a motel with him. He was clever enough to pick out the best motel he could find. Their room contained a shower, the first one Bonnie had ever seen in a room.

Everything she had known in life had been primitive in its poverty and bareness, even during the time she had spent with Ray Hamilton because Hamilton wanted to spend his money on liquor and fast cars. There had been nothing of beauty for her to gaze on, to wrap around herself in all the years she had known.

She bought every magazine she could afford that contained pictures of women in luxurious surroundings, read them avidly, and pictured herself in the same environment as the models who were posed in the various shots. After a while she would stop, look into the mirror and see the reality of the image that stared back at her.

"It ain't no good, Bonnie," she said to her reflection. "It ain't gon-

na come to nothin' so you better forget it."

But she couldn't forget it, and she kept on buying the magazines, the movie magazines, the service magazines, the women's group that featured debutantes and young matrons in their worlds of splendor and luxury. The hunger for a slice of their lives tore at her, and her sense of hopelessness was a frustration that was unbearable.

"Some day," she vowed, "some day, I'm gonna get something like it, if only for a day I'm gonna have something like it."

She was hopeful now that perhaps Clyde Barrow might be able to give her those things. She was willing to chance it. To pay for it with the price he asked. But not tonight.

He tried to take her in his arms the moment they were in the room but she twisted out of his grasp with an agile turn of her body and walked several steps away from him.

"No, Mr. Clyde Barrow. I don't want you to touch me. Not tonight. What I want is to wash my face—no, take a hot shower and then feel something clean and soft and light next to my body, and then to get some sleep. Tomorrow, after I awake, after I've taken another look at you and thought things over—who knows?"

"But I want you now. What's the matter with now?"

Her lips formed into a grim line



BONNIE

and her eyes narrowed. "Clyde, if you ever hope to have me you better do it my way. I've said my piece. You want to go along or you want me to get out?"

"Can I help you take a bath? Can I wash your back?"

She thought a moment then shrugged. "If you want to. But I'm telling you now, and for sure, it ain't gonna help none. My mind's made up. And see you behave. If you don't you're gonna get a dose of hot lead from that forty-five you put on the dresser."

"It ain't a forty-five. It's a thirty-eight—Police Positive."

"Well, whatever it is."

He grinned and shook his head in a resigned gesture. "All right, Bonnie. Just as you say."

When they came out of the bathroom she looked small, golden, appealing, with a fresh clean smell about her, and Clyde started toward her.

"Get back, damn it!" she said in a low voice. "I told you, didn't I? I told you and I meant it!"

The determination in her voice told him that this half-pint of female was a full grown tiger.

"I don't understand you, Bonnie. I thought you were gonna be my girl."

"Do I ask to be understood? Did I say I want you to understand me? All you want is to have your way, and tomorrow morning you'll be gone. I understand *that*. And I understand you. But I don't want you tonight. That's what you don't understand. But you better. Now, I'm gettin' in bed."

She moved away from him, got into one of the twin beds, drew up the clean sheet and the cover, made a satisfying sound, yawned, closed her eyes. She was asleep in minutes.

Clyde looked at her sleeping form, swore, and got into his own bed. As he did so Bonnie emitted a gentle snoring sound, like that of a purring kitten. A faint smile seemed to break over her face as if she were in the throes of a satisfying dream, and then she was still and the sleep she was in bathed her face in contentment.

When she awoke in the morning Clyde was already up. He smiled

at her and moved toward the bed. She leaped out of the bed with an adroitness that startled him.

"I didn't say you could get in bed with me, did I?"

"But you hinted last night that you would—"

He came toward her and was about to grab her and take her in his arms when her hand lashed out and she slapped him sharply across the face.

"Don't touch me, you bastard, or I'll kill you!"

Her slap had been hard, much too hard for a woman her size, and he was taken aback for a brief moment but he grabbed her wrists and tried to pull her to him. It took all the strength he had to hold her and then only for a few seconds because she twisted out of his grasp and slapped him again. He grappled with her but couldn't hold her and when she twisted out of his grip again she ran to the dresser behind her, snatched up the gun and pointed it at his belly.

"No, don't, Bonnie! Don't shoot me. I—I didn't mean it. I just want you so bad I can't help myself. You're my girl. I hope you are. I want you to be. You said you would be. It's you and me, Bonnie. For always."

She looked at him for a long time in silence and then she smiled, turned, put the gun back on the dresser, and got in to bed. He stared at her hopefully the while she gazed at him with a faint smile

playing at the corners of her mobile mouth.

"Why are you standing there, Clyde?" she asked in a small voice. "You'll catch a cold standing there like that."

He let out a whoop and ran to the bed, jumped in and took her in his arms.

IT WAS AN hour later and Bonnie sat in a chair by the window and smoked a cigarette thoughtfully. Clyde sat in another chair across the room, his head down, his hands folded between his knees.

What, Bonnie wondered, was the matter with him? He had wanted her so much. Yet when she had surrendered to him he was incapable of fulfilling the desire he had so strongly implied. She had anticipated agony and ecstasy, and had allowed the powerful surge of her own desire to envelop her only to find a shame-faced, impotent man at her side. When she got out of bed she was shivering. She turned toward him.

"Clyde—"

He looked up.

"I ain't enough woman?"

"Sure, Bonnie. It ain't you. It's me. Maybe it's because I wanted you so much, me just being out of stir and all." He got up from the chair and walked to where she sat, put an arm around her shoulders. "Maybe after I get rid of the stir stink inside of me I'll be okay again."

Bonnie Parker nodded her head in silence.

What he didn't tell her was that he had been a prison punk, a guns-el, a kid used by tough cons for sexual purposes, and that in the process his natural sex impulses had been dimmed and shattered. There were other things in his life which, if one had sought to analyze at the time, would have provoked the thought and belief that the bitter end toward which he was riding was all but inevitable.

When he was still a kid he was involved in petty thefts in the tough West Dallas section where he grew up, and where his father, Harry Barrow, operator of a small garage in the neighborhood, was known as a man who couldn't control his two truant sons, Clyde and Marvin.

Marvin was a dull, slow-thinking, illiterate boy and no better as a man. With Clyde he stole hub caps and tires from cars, broke into country stores and robbed them of cigarettes, candy, and small items of clothing which they peddled to the poor of the neighborhood at a fraction of their worth.

Clyde's vicious bent also cropped up at the same time. He would capture stray cats and dogs and torture them. He trapped birds, broke their wings and laughed with glee as he watched the crippled birds' futile attempts to fly from their tormenting captor.

In January, 1930, Marvin and

Clyde were nabbed trying to steal a car in Henrietta, Texas. Clyde drew two years and Marvin four at the Huntsville State Prison, one of the toughest pens in the country where the cons were made to work in the fields from sunup to sundown with shotgun-bearing screws riding herd on them. They came to state-wide attention shortly thereafter.

Two months after being committed, Marvin became a trusty and walked away from the prison. He returned several days later, smuggled hacksaws to Clyde, who cut his way to freedom, taking two other cons with him. He was recaptured a short time later in Middletown, Ohio, returned to Texas and sentenced to fourteen years. He was pardoned after cutting off his toes, returned to Dallas, and met Bonnie Parker.

Clyde walked across the room, talking as he walked, trying hard to win back the favor he was sure he had lost.

"I'll make it up to you, Bonnie," he said. "Only stick with me. I need you."

"What're we gonna live on?" she asked. "I ain't got any money, and you done spent all or most of yours."

He strode to the dresser. "With this, Bonnie." He waved the gun. "I'll get some money first thing in the morning."

"I want to go along," she said, an excitement welling up within

her. "But we don't have a car!" she pointed out. "We need a car."

He gave a short laugh. "We've got a car." He waved an arm toward the window. "Any car out there is ours. You pick one out and I'll take it."

She threw her arms around his neck in a wild outburst of elation. "Gee, can you do that? Can you really do that?"

"Watch me. Come on, let's go to bed. We'll get up early and catch somebody before they're awake."

They were up early, washed and dressed the while Bonnie kept chattering away, overcome with excitement. "Who we going to rob first, Clyde? You got somebody in mind?"

He shrugged. "Don't make no difference. The first place we see that looks good."

When they were out of the motel Bonnie spied a Buick sedan.

Without a word, Clyde walked nonchalantly to the Buick, raised the hood, unhooked some wires, hooked them to other wires, lowered the hood and motioned to Bonnie to get in. They were on their way.

"Is that all there is to it?" she asked, admiration for his cleverness unmistakable in her tone. He beamed back at her as he maneuvered the car expertly down the highway, pushing the throttle to the floorboard as the needle of the speedometer slid to seventy. A gas station loomed ahead on the high-

way and Clyde drove in to a smooth stop. A young man in his twenties came out.

"Fill her up," Clyde ordered.

"Yes, sir. Check the oil?"

"Sure. Check everything."

Bonnie sat in the front seat with butterflies of hot excitement coursing through her stomach. Any minute now it would happen. She could hardly contain herself.

"Four dollars and twenty cents," the attendant said.

Clyde smiled easily. "Got change for a twenty?"

"Yeah, I think so."

"Let's go get it."

They started toward the building, the attendant in front, when Clyde drew the pistol from the waistband of his trousers and clubbed the attendant over the head. He fell unconscious at Clyde's feet. Clyde ran into the building, tapped the register and ran out. They were rolling before the young man came to.

Bonnie couldn't contain herself. She was all over Clyde, her hands pulling at his coat, her arms around his neck, her lips all over his face. He fought to keep the car under control as she tried to pull him toward her in a frenzy of excitement, passion, and ardor. He ran the car onto the shoulder of the road and stopped, his face burning with anger.

He pointed a finger at her. "Bonnie, goddammit, you can't do that to me. I mean, I'm hot. There's

a man with a busted head back there!"

She struck a pose. "Oh, Clyde, it was terrific! Did we get a lot of money?"

"Come on," he urged. "We have to get the hell outta here but quick. You can have the money we got when we stop some place."

He drove at breakneck speeds through backroads until they were out of the county. Passing a farmhouse, he spied a car parked alongside the house. He braked to a stop, ran to the car, unscrewed the license plates, ran back, and they drove off.

"Why did you do that?" she asked.

"Switch plates so we can keep this car a little longer."

They checked into a motel some forty miles from the scene of their first crime together and Clyde locked the door, pulled the loot from a pocket and threw it on the bed.

Bonnie leaped toward it, snatched it up in her two hands and held it aloft.

"Isn't it beautiful! We can buy things now. Lots of things. I want some silk things, silk underwear, silk stockings, and silk everything!" She paused a moment in her chattering, looked at Clyde intently, said, "And you know what else I want?"

"No. What else?"

"I want a gun. Just like yours. And I want to learn to shoot. I



want you to show me everything you know about guns."

He gave her a close look. "Why? What do you want a gun for?"

"In case you need help," she said cryptically.

"I was thinking of that. I was thinking of springing Buck."

"Who's Buck?"

"My brother Marvin. He's in Huntsville."

"Well," she said, and drew the word out, "so is Ray Hamilton. How about springing Ray too?"

"I don't know nothin' about no Ray Hamilton and don't care to, see. I know Buck, and that's who I want."

She threw the money she held down on the bed faced him with arms akimbo and eyes narrowed. The words came out slowly and deliberately. "You want Buck. I want Ray. I know what he can do. He's small, but with a gun in his hand he's the biggest man in the world."

"Yeah? Well, maybe that ain't the reason. Maybe you want him for other things too."

It was a shot in the dark, not because he knew anything of Hamil-

ton's relations with her, but he did know that she needed men, all the time, and so far he hadn't been able to help her. The thought of that shamed him again.

She didn't answer right away but thought back to the days and nights with Hamilton, how he couldn't leave her alone. It was true. She wanted that again. But she wouldn't admit it to Clyde.

She said, "Two good men with guns are better than one. Two good men and a good woman. That's me."

"Buck is good."

"All right then; we'll try to spring Buck and Ray."

Clyde didn't answer but went to the bed, gathered up the money and counted it. "Eighty-four dollars." He peeled off ten dollars and put it in his pocket, handed her the rest. "Here, you can buy them silk things you want."

"I want a gun first."

"There's a gun store down the road a piece. I'll get some guns from there tonight."

"I'll go with you."

He shrugged. "If you want to."

They broke into the gun store shortly after midnight, took five pistols, four rifles, four shotguns, and about ten boxes of ammo. They checked out of the motel and were on their way.

In the next week Clyde taught her how to handle a gun, how to shoot it and ride with the recoil. She was an apt pupil, so much so

that soon she could outshoot him. That bothered him but he said nothing to her about it.

She was eager to put her prowess with a gun into practical use and urged Clyde to look for places to rob. In the ensuing weeks they held up several gas stations and as many country grocery stores. In Hillsboro, Texas, Clyde shot a filling station operator, and when the man was down Bonnie fired three shots toward the inert form.

"I hit him! I hit him!" she cried, and would have fired more shots at the dead man, but Clyde pulled her away and the two raced for their car and sped off. Their loot was less than \$50.

THEY MOVED SWIFTLY across East and Central Texas, robbing as they went, shooting and killing. The entire State of Texas was up in arms over the wanton killings and the unspeakable incandescent red murder lust of the slip of a girl who aimed her gun point-blank and shot.

Their names were known now and spoken with a strange awe and shivering sense of repugnance by the decent people of the state. Their crimes were picked up by the many news services and carried in newspapers across the country. Bonnie read each paper she could find in which their exploits were printed with avid pleasure.

About this time, Marvin Barrow was released from jail. He made a

quick marriage to a dull, hysterical woman and brought her to Bonnie and Clyde's current hideout. The brothers embraced with great affection, pounded each other on the back, yelled, punched each other, and danced around like a couple of drunken Indians. At last both grew calm and Buck introduced his wife.

"This here's Blanche. My wife."

Clyde shook hands with her. "Glad to know you, Blanche. And this here is Bonnie. We're partners."

The two women looked at each other with obvious distaste but Buck liked what he saw and shook hands with Bonnie enthusiastically.

A drunken celebration followed, and the next day the brothers began planning a robbery. Blanche was against it from the outset.

"Buck, don't, don't do it! You'll only get caught and go back to prison. Buck, I don't want to lose you. I couldn't stand that. Buck, please don't do it. Let's get out of here. Let's get out of Texas. We'll go some place far away where you can get a job and we can live like decent folks!"

Bonnie leaped from the bed. "You silly bitch!" she cried. "Shut your damn mouth!"

Blanche stared white-faced and shaken at Bonnie and raised a hand to her mouth. She ran to Buck and threw her arms around his neck.

"Buck, don't let her talk to me

like that," she wailed. "She's crazy. She'll kill me. Buck, take me out of here!"

"Bonnie," Clyde said sternly, "you cut out that talk, hear? That's Buck's wife you were talking to!"

"Well, she's still a silly bitch!" Bonnie retorted. "What the hell does she think he's going to work at—a waiter in a cheap hash joint, or a dishwasher? What the hell can he do? I told you to spring Ray. This guy ain't nothin' at all, brother or no brother!"

"Like hell I ain't!" Buck shouted. "I'm as good as Clyde." He turned to Clyde. "Tell her. I'm as good as you, ain't I?"

"Sure he is," Clyde said. "He's my brother, ain't he?"

Bonnie was breathing hard in her anger at Blanche because she saw her as an obstacle to her plans. On the other hand, she thought, it might be just the thing to rid herself of both. She changed tactics. "Well, maybe she's right. Maybe Buck ought to leave with her and find himself a job some place."

"I ain't gonna go no place," Buck put in. "I'm stayin' right here with Clyde. That's what I come for."

Blanche started to cry. "Buck, don't. Let's leave. Let's go. We'll go to St. Louis or Tulsa. We'll live like people."

"Now you hush up, Blanche. I'm a-stayin' right here with my brother." He then threw her a challenge. "Iffen you wanna go

you can. Iffen you wanna stay then I don't wanna hear no more talk of goin', see?"

Blanche stopped crying and started to whimper. Buck took her arms from around his neck, walked into the kitchen and got her a glass of water.

"Here, drink this. You'll be okay then."

Blanche drank the water, then walked over to the bed and laid down, covered her face with her hands.

Bonnie said, "Now that Buck's here to help, I think it's about time we did something important."

"Yeah, like what?" Clyde asked.

"Banks," Bonnie answered. "If you want gas you go to a gas station. If you want food you go to a grocery store. But if you want money you go to a bank. There's a nice little bank in town. I'll go into town and look it over and let you know the best way we can rob it."

"That damn picture you made me take of you and send to the newspapers—people will recognize you. You'll get picked up," Clyde told her.

"No, I won't. I'll wear a hat pulled down over my eyes, and a nice white blouse and dark skirt, and carry a parasol. That one there," she said, and pointed to a gaily colored parasol."

"Where did you get that?" Clyde asked.

"It was in the restaurant we ate in yesterday morning. It was just

what I wanted, in case I had to go into town to look over a bank."

Bonnie went into town looking like a shy Southern belle who might swoon if a man spoke to her. No man did but many of them looked, which, in her woman's heart, she wanted them to do. At the moment, however, she was interested in the small bank and its contents of nice green money. She was observant and thorough, and after looking the bank over she strolled around the block to get an idea of what they might run into just in case trouble came.

She drove back to the house shivering with the thought of holding up a bank. The excitement coursed through her with sharp, hot flashes as she visualized herself in the bank with a machine gun in her hands, and what the papers would say about her after the robbery.

"Well, what's it like?" Clyde asked.

"There ain't nothing to it," she replied. "It'll be as easy as pie."

"I'm scared," Blanche said. "Buck, don't do it. Please don't do it."

"Blanche, I told you to shut up, didn't I?" Buck shouted at her. "Now you get back on that there bed and stay there until Bonnie finishes talking."

Bonnie picked up a stub of pencil and a piece of brown wrapping paper and outlined the layout of the bank, the streets surrounding it,

and the getaway route. "We'll be outta there and in Longview in a half hour. Longview is a purty big city and we can hole up until the heat dies down a little."

Blanche moaned from the bed. "Oh, my God, my God!"

Bonnie looked toward her and sneered, "Oh, my God your foot, you rabbit-hearted, snivelin' bum!"

"Bonnie," Clyde shouted, "I told you to cut that out!"

"Well, she gives me a pain with her goddam talk of being scared."

"I don't care where she gives you a pain, just cut that damn talk out. Let's talk about the bank. What's the best time to take it."

"Right now," Bonnie replied. "We can be in Longview by noon."

"Okay then. Let's go." He walked across the room, picked up a machine gun, checked it. Satisfied, he said to Buck, "Take the other machine gun."

"No," Bonnie said. "I'm gonna carry that. I know how to use it. Buck don't." She turned to Buck. "You ever use one of these things?"

"No, but I don't think it's any different from any other gun."

Bonnie smiled. "Ain't it now? Well, Buck, it is. You use a pistol."

"Yeah, Bonnie's right, Buck," Clyde said. "These here are tricky."

Buck shrugged, picked up two pistols and put them in the band of his trousers. The three then gathered up all the rest of the stuff, carried it out to the car and threw

it on the floor on the rear seat. Bonnie and Clyde got in the front and Buck and Blanche in the rear. Blanche huddled against Buck, a frightened bundle of tearful humanity.

When they arrived in town Bonnie said, "Park around the corner, Clyde. We'll be headed toward Longview then."

Clyde parked, looked around, said, "Okay, let's go."

The three got out of the car quickly and marched into the bank.

"This here is the Barrow gang," Bonnie shouted, and moved the machine gun threateningly. "Everybody lie down on the floor so I don't have to kill you."

"Move, move!" Clyde yelled. "Hurry! Hurry!"

The panic stricken customers dropped to the floor. Bonnie stood near the door and covered the customers and workers of the bank while Clyde and Buck ran behind the counter and began stuffing money from the tills into paper sacks. Luckily, no one entered the bank while the holdup was in progress and it was all over in two minutes.

As they stepped out of the bank, a Texas Ranger deputy spied them from across the street, saw the guns in their hands and sized up the situation. He drew his gun and started toward them at the same time that Bonnie saw him. She leveled her machine gun and squeezed

the trigger. The explosion rocked the street. The deputy dropped in his tracks, a half-dozen slugs in his belly. He was dead when he hit the ground.

The three raced for the car, leaped in, and were off in seconds, Clyde, driving like a madman, turned from one road into another. The car thundering over the dirt roads, weaving wildly through the ruts, careening from side to side but remaining upright. Blanche screamed hysterically all the time and Buck couldn't quiet her. They were out of the county in fifteen minutes and on a highway leading into Longview.

Clyde said, "Did you have to kill that sheriff?"

"Of course," Bonnie answered calmly. "He had his gun out and was coming toward us. What did you want me to do, let him kill one of us?"

"She didn't have to kill him!" Blanche shrieked. "We could've got away. She didn't have to kill him!"

Bonnie half-turned in her seat. "Why don't you keep your cotton-pickin' mouth shut!"

Blanche yelled in anguish and turned into Buck's arms.

They found a motel that looked safe and Clyde said, "Bonnie, put on your hat and take your parasol and get a room for us."

While Bonnie was registering, Clyde parked the car around the back of the motel, out of view of

the highway, gathered up the machine guns, wrapped them in a blanket, and waited for Bonnie. She came out several minutes later with a key in her hand, pointed to the end cabin, the very one behind which Clyde had parked the car. He carried in the blanket-wrapped machine guns and threw them on the bed. Buck and Bonnie had the sacks of money.

"Lock the door," Clyde said to Buck. He then emptied the sacks of money on the bed.

Bonnie smiled broadly. "Now ain't that purty!"

For the first time in two days Blanche permitted a faint smile to break the corners of her mouth. "I get my share too, don't I? After all, I was in the car. I could've got killed if that sheriff had shot at us."

Bonnie's face tightened as she waited for Clyde's answer. He looked at Bonnie, saw the grim face, shrugged. It was either her anger or Blanche's wailing. He decided he preferred Bonnie's anger. "Sure, Blanche. You can have a share."

Bonnie let out a string of oaths, strode into the bathroom and slammed the door.

By nightfall Bonnie had cooled off and things were as normal as they could be under the circumstances. Clyde sent Bonnie and Blanche out to find a grocery store and buy some food.

"Don't you get outta that damn car, Bonnie, hear? Let Blanche go

in the store alone, and see that you don't let anybody get a look at you."

The two women were back in a half hour with two sacks of food and two newspapers which Bonnie carried.

"She made me go back into the store to get the papers," Blanche complained. "I mighta been seen."

"If you was, Blanche," Bonnie said flippantly, "it's a safe bet nobody looked at you the second time."

"Cut it out, Bonnie!" Clyde warned.

Bonnie smiled sweetly and went to the bed, sat down, unfolded a paper and said in a hushed voice, "Listen to this. We're right on the front page!"

She read the story of the holdup and the murder of the sheriff as if she were reading an item in a society column of a debutante's gala coming-out ball. The words "sensational, professional, brutal, heartless, cowed customers, paralyzed bank employees" rolled off her tongue like warm honey. Clyde and Buck were as pleased. They had finally hit the big time. They were bank robbers.

Luck rode with them. Clyde thought it best to get out of Texas for a while. They holed up in a small town in Oklahoma, in a house they rented on the outskirts. For a time things were peaceful. The two women got along because Blanche was happily engaged in



spending her share of the loot. They soon ran out of money, however, and Bonnie plotted another bank job.

They moved across six states—New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, and Louisiana with lightning speed, and in each instance there was either a shooting or a killing. The names of Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker became synonymous with harsh, implacable, cruel, senseless murder. Their pictures were posted in every post office and peace officer's division in the Southwest.

About a thousand men now hunted them. Foolishly, they returned to Texas, and as foolishly to the edge of Rowena because Bonnie wanted to see her mother. She managed the visit in a field surrounded by small hills and clusters of trees.

Her mother said, "Don't come back here no more. If you do, you're gonna get killed. Just keep going, Bonnie. Keep running.

There ain't nothin' else left for you to do."

Mrs. Parker knew of the killings. Seven in Texas, one in Arkansas, two in Missouri, and one in Oklahoma. And it wasn't yet the end.

They left Texas and drove into Iowa, where they pulled a series of stickups. They robbed and ran, hunted things, their lives not their own anymore, and no one knew it better than Bonnie. She didn't care. She would go as long as she could, as far as she could. When it was over, it would be over. But while it lasted she would enjoy all the thrills she got out of walking into a bank, machine gun in her hands, and watching the looks of consternation, fear and awesome terror on the faces of people when she said, "This is the Clyde Barrow gang, and this here is a stickup!"

One day Bonnie spied an amusement park in Iowa, a place called Dexfield Park, and said, "Let's stop here. Let's go on the rides and eat hot dogs. Clyde, let's go in!"

Clyde thought it would be safe, as did Buck, so they drove into the park, bought sacks of hot dogs, cold drinks, found a table and sat down on the benches. The park was surrounded by heavily wooded picnic grounds. On the east side of the picnic grounds ran a river. It seemed like a good place to rest and relax. But someone took a good look at Clyde and Bonnie, recognized them, and hastily called

the police. Groups of G-Men, local police officers, and state cops surrounded the grounds.

A nervous, over-anxious cop fired before the pre-arranged signal, and Clyde leaped from his seat, snatched the gun he carried inside his belt and returned the fire, running as he did so toward the car.

Bonnie dashed after him, grabbed the machine gun from the front seat, aimed it toward a group of cops running toward her and pressed the trigger. She let loose withering bursts of fire and the cops dropped to the ground to escape the deadly barrage. The picnic grounds suddenly were turned into scenes of churning, wild pandemonium. Men and women screamed, clutched at children, and ran behind trees for shelter. The firing continued for a full minute. Clyde yelled to Buck and Blanche to run to the car and as he did so a slug caught Buck in the chest and spun him around.

"You bastards!" Clyde yelled, and grabbed up the other machine gun. He fired wildly toward the cops shooting at Buck. Two more slugs caught Buck, one in the back that shattered his spine. He dropped to the ground with blood pouring out of his mouth as if someone had turned on a faucet inside of him. Blanche screamed at the top of her lungs.

Cops were still firing at Buck. Blanche was hit in the shoulder

but she didn't feel it. All she saw was Buck lying on the ground, his face covered with blood, his glazed eyes staring at her. More slugs hit Buck and Blanche screamed insanely.

"Stop! Stop He's dead! Stop! Don't shoot him anymore!"

Bonnie and Clyde kept on firing at the cops, and then Clyde jumped into the car while Bonnie continued to hold the cops at bay with her machine gun. Clyde yelled at her.

"Get in! Get in! Get in!"

Bonnie kept on firing, her face burning with excitement. At last she dove into the car and Clyde spun the wheels as he shot onto the highway. Slugs tore into the body of the car and several struck the gas tank.

Clyde swore. "We're hit. We'll have to leave the car!"

"Over there!" Bonnie yelled. "Near the woods. We'll run for the river. It's our only chance!"

He braked the car just as it burst into flames and the two leaped out and raced for the river. They made it and started to swim across. The gang of cops behind them fired without letup. Fountains of spray steamed around them as they stroked frantically through the water in a mad effort to reach the shore and safety of the woods.

A slug grazed Bonnie's head. She let out a moan and sank unconscious. All but strangling, she battled back to consciousness,

coughed up the water she had swallowed, and continued to swim with leaden arms.

Clyde had already gained the shore and was waiting for her on his belly as the cops across the river continued firing.

"Hurry, Bonnie, hurry!"

She stroked harder, though still faint from the force of the shock the slug caused. She finally made the shore and Clyde yanked her up. They ran, half-stumbling, winded, fighting for breath, made the woods and disappeared. They had won their lives under the most harrowing and deadly of their experiences. And Buck was dead.

The cops combed the woods for hours. It was useless. Bonnie and Clyde were nowhere to be found. In this time of their greatest peril luck still favored them. They found a motorist who had stopped on the shoulder of the road, took his car under the threat of Clyde's gun and sped off. And for the first time, Bonnie noticed that Clyde also had been shot.

"It's in the arm," Clyde said. "A grazing shot. I'm okay."

He drove in silence while Bonnie dozed, her head on her chest, her face bathed in the pain that had infected her. He gazed at her from time to time as he drove and thought that she looked like a little sad girl. He felt, for the first time since they had met, an obligation of protectiveness for her. He had almost got her killed.

He took the gun out of his waistband, flipped it open, shook out the shells as he drove. They were all spent. He pulled off to the side of the road and stopped, reached down on the floor behind him and picked up two pistols, examined them.

They were fully loaded. He put them into the waistband of his trousers and drove on. Bonnie continued to sleep.

He drove on without really knowing where he was going. All he knew was that he had to put as much distance between them and the Iowa cops as he could. He made the backroads, ever on the alert for a roadblock or a patrolling police car. He was tired and spent and as he thought of Buck and the way he died he was overwhelmed by remorse.

When Blanche had wanted Buck to leave with her that first day he should have insisted on it instead of the silent agreement he had indicated when Buck had said he was going to stay with him. Buck just wasn't cut out for this kind of life—*hadn't* been cut out for it, he thought as the realization hit him that Buck could no longer be thought of in the present.

He blamed himself for Buck's death. Now, all he had was Bonnie and he had to protect her in every way. He told himself he would do it. He would stop her from all those goddam silly chances she took, from exposing herself on oc-

casions when there was no need to do it.

THE SUN SANK in the west and the twilight was a comforting thing to Clyde Barrow, made it harder to spot the car. Bonnie Parker slept on, little moans escaping her lips from time to time as she turned in her sleep. He glanced at her and brooded over her wound, and told himself he would make every damn cop he met pay for that shot that had grazed her head. Just let one of them lousy cops get in his way, that's all. He realized all at once that he cared more than he had ever known for her, that he loved her, that she meant all the world to him. He reached out a hand and touched her hair.

Night fell and the road was dark, a greater shield to protect them. He passed a country store before he saw it, stopped abruptly and backed up, looked it over and drove behind it. He got out of the car and peered into the windows. There wasn't a house around for a mile. This should be easy.

He took a heavy screwdriver out of the car, jimmied the door, and went in, gun in hand. He located an icebox, took out meat and cheese, found bread, a bag, and threw the stuff into it. In the window was a display of fruit. He filled the bag. To the left he saw a rack of guns, high-powered rifles. He selected six, found shells for them, put them on the counter and

searched for handguns. He found them, took four, and several boxes of cartridges. He carried everything out to the car, then went back in and rifled the cash-drawer. There were several bills of small denomination and about twenty dollars in silver. He took that too.

Beneath the cash-drawer he spied a gallon jug half-filled with a white liquid. He picked it up, pulled the cork and sniffed. White mule. Good strong liquor. Just what they needed.

In the car again he sped on, and before long spied a sign which told him they were in Oklahoma. About a mile later he saw a road to the right and drove into it for about a hundred yards and parked. He touched Bonnie lightly and whispered her name. She awoke slowly.

"We're okay, Bonnie," he said. "I got us some stuff. Food, money and guns. And some liquor." He poured some in a glass he had taken from the store and handed it to her. "Here, drink this."

She took a drink from the glass and coughed. "It's strong."

"White mule. Drink the rest."

She finished the glass and he poured half a tumbler for himself and drank it down. He then took out the meat, cheese, and bread and offered it to her.

"I'm not hungry, Clyde," she said in a low voice. "I don't know if I'll ever be hungry again."

"Sure you will. Eat something. It will give you some guts."



She forced herself to eat. He ate several slices of bread and as many slices of cheese and ham, took another half-tumbler of the liquor then reached back for two of the rifles, loaded them and put them between them.

"We got a little more protection now, Bonnie. We're in Oklahoma, far away from Iowa."

"Where're we going?"

"I dunno. I'll see."

He turned the car around, got back on the road from which he had turned off and headed south. When dawn broke they were back in Texas.

Off the road he saw a row of cabins and pulled in. He took the blood-soaked coat and threw it on the back seat, rolled up his sleeve to hide the blood-soaked fabric and went in to register. The sleepy owner didn't even look up as Clyde signed the register with a fictitious name, got the key and went out.

In the cabin he washed Bonnie's scalp of the dried blood and looked at the wound. It was superficial. She would be okay after she had rested. His own arm was numb and the slug was still in it.

He knew he had to get it out but that a doctor would have to do it. Later, after they had rested. He put Bonnie to bed and she was asleep the moment her head hit the pillow. He went out, searched the car and found a clean shirt and clean clothes for Bonnie, took them into the cabin, threw them over a chair, got into bed, and was asleep in minutes. When he awoke the sun was high in the heavens. He washed, dressed, and woke Bonnie. She was almost her old self again. He pointed to the clean clothes.

She went into the bathroom, took a hot shower and felt a lot more refreshed. "How's your arm, Clyde?"

"Numb. We'll have to find a doctor. Come on. Let's get out of here."

They drove for about an hour when they came to the edge of Marlow, Oklahoma, a small town of some three-thousand population, and to the right of the road Clyde saw a two-story white house with a physician's sign stuck on a two-by-four in the front yard. He pulled up, stopped, and got out.

"You stay in the car, Bonnie," he ordered. "Keep one of them rifles handy."

He went into the house and was greeted by an elderly woman in a nurse's uniform.

"I wanna see the doctor."

"About yourself?"

"Yes."

"Come this way, please."

He followed her into a room at the back of the house where the doctor, a man in his fifties, looked up.

"I need some help, Doc," he said.

The nurse was about to leave when he said, "Stay here." The tone of his voice took her aback. "I'm Clyde Barrow. I've been shot and want a slug taken out of my arm. I've got a partner out in the car. If you two don't want any trouble just take out the slug and don't do anything wrong."

The doctor said, "You're in all the papers, Mister Barrow, and on the radio. The police in this state are on the lookout for you."

"I know. Just take out the slug."

The doctor examined the wound. "You're lucky. Usually, about this time infection sets in." He worked quickly and efficiently, removed the slug and dressed the wound. "There you are. You'll be okay now."

"Thanks. How much do I owe you?"

"Nothing. It's on the house."

"You ain't scared of me, are you?"

"No," the doctor said evenly. "Why should I be? I don't intend to do you any wrong and you know it."

"That's right, Doc."

"How's Bonnie?"

Clyde stared at him uncertainly for several moments. "She's okay. It was only a scalp wound."

"That's fine, fine. I'm sorry about your brother."

"Yeah, so am I." He looked at the nurse. "I hope I didn't scare you none." She was scared but she didn't say so. He nodded to them and hurried out.

When he was gone, the doctor said, "Give them an hour and then phone the police. Ethics, you know."

"Yes, sir," the nurse said. "I understand."

In the next week Bonnie and Clyde were fully recovered and started out again on their maraudings. They sped from state to state, so swiftly that the cops couldn't keep track of them.

In Colorado, Clyde shot and killed a cop. Bonnie evened the score by killing a filling station operator in Kansas. She also shot and killed a highway patrolman who looked suspiciously at them. They were hotter than ever.

"We need a good man with us," Bonnie said. "Let try to spring Ray Hamilton."

"It's too risky, Bonnie. If we go into Texas we'll get shot again sure as hell."

Bonnie was insistent. "If we don't we'll get shot anyway. We need Ray. I want him out, Clyde."

It took a month of planning to set up the caper but it was finally done. On a foggy morning Clyde and Bonnie waited in a ditch several hundred yards from the Eastham Prison Farm just outside of Crockett, Texas. Each was armed with a machine gun.

Clyde was taut, Bonnie no more concerned than if she were waiting with casual disinterest for a waitress to take her order in a restaurant. In a short while they heard men talking, and then they saw them. Bonnie leaped from the ditch and yelled loudly.

"Ray! Ray Hamilton! This way. Hurry!"

There was a sudden sound of running feet, then a blast from a shotgun, and then Bonnie answered the screw's shot with a burst from her machine gun. In seconds, Ray Hamilton came into view. Behind him ran a half dozen other cops.

The two guards kept firing in the direction where Hamilton had ran. Bonnie and Clyde returned the fire. The deadly machine guns found their marks. One of the guards dropped dead in his tracks, hit by half a dozen slugs, the other was seriously wounded. Bonnie, Clyde, and Ray raced for the car, leaped in and were off leaving the other cons standing by the roadside. They ran into the woods, away from the prison and disappeared.

The sensational release of Hamilton and the killing of one guard and wounding of the other was all the State of Texas could stand. The governor ordered the Rangers to get the trio or else, and into the hunt came Frank Hamer, the toughest lawman in the Southwest. He was joined by Vic Register, another noted manhunter, along with the entire complement of peace officers from six states and the FBI. But it wasn't to be that easy.

Hamer knew that Bonnie was, without a doubt, the most dangerous of the three desperadoes. She could use a pistol, rifle, shotgun, or machine gun with equal deadliness. He attributed at least a dozen killings to her personally.

"This little trollop is more dangerous than Dillinger was. She kills without motive," Hamer said.

For more than three months Hamer followed them with relentless determination, from Texas to the Mexican border, up into Can-

ada, and back down again to the midwest, but they were always just an hour or two ahead of him, and that was all Clyde Barrow needed.

The trio literally went crazy in their violences. They robbed and killed wherever they were, Hamilton and Bonnie trying to outdo each other.

In Grapevine, Texas, on a bright Easter Sunday in 1934, two motorcycle cops spotted them and gave chase as they drove along a highway. Clyde saw them in the rear-view mirror and yelled to Bonnie and Hamilton.

"There's cops behind us. On motorcycles. They're following us!"

Bonnie was in the back seat with Hamilton. She picked up a rifle, broke the rear window, took aim and fired. She got the cop in front, and then sighted on the remaining cop, squeezed off another shot and knocked the cop off the motorcycle and into the ditch. She laughed in glee.

Hamer and Register got the news of the shootings and swore in frustration. For the next several weeks nothing was heard of the trio. They were obviously holed up.

They were. Somewhere in Louisiana. Bonnie and Hamilton found ways to be alone from time to time and took advantage of it. She was gayer than ever, unmindful of the constant dangers they faced, or the roadblocks they ran into from which they had to shoot their way clear.

One day Clyde went out and said he would be back in an hour. When he had gone Bonnie lay down on the bed, folded her arms behind her head and closed her eyes. She had seen to it that her dress was pulled up halfway over her knees.

A half-hour later, Clyde returned and knew what had happened.

"You lousy, dirty bastard!" Clyde yelled and hit Hamilton several blows to the back of the head. They fought out of the bathroom and into the bedroom with Clyde flailing away with both fists. He was larger and heavier and could use his fists. He beat Hamilton to a pulp. Bonnie watched silently from the bed, secretly pleased over the fact that the two men were fighting over her.

"We're through!" Clyde said to Hamilton. "Get the hell outta here."

Hamilton washed off the blood from his face, dressed, picked up his guns and walked out of the house.

It was the last time they saw each other alive.

In the next several days Hamer received information as to Bonnie and Clyde's hideout. Maybe Hamilton turned them in, and maybe he didn't. No one ever really knew. The house Bonnie and Clyde had taken was about fifty feet off the highway, set between two hills of sand which served as a protective

barrier. The car was parked behind the house.

Hamer received his information with a great deal of satisfaction and relief. It was all over at last. This time Bonnie and Clyde wouldn't get away.

Intricate roadblocks were set up on every dirt road leading from the house, or from the main road. State troopers, local cops, FBI Agents, and Frank Hamer and the six men with him crouched in a ditch behind a clump of bushes and waited.

In front of the house a half dozen peace officers moved slowly toward the entrance. Clyde spotted them.

"Bonnie! Cops! Out the back way!"

They each snatched up a machine gun and ran out the back door, leaped into the car. Clyde gunned the motor while Bonnie lowered the rear window, cocked the machine gun and poked its nose through the opening. The car shot around the corner of the house with Bonnie firing away. It caught the lawmen by surprise and they dropped to the ground as the car roared past them, turned left and sped down the highway.

Clyde Barrow took a back road, raced the car down it, then saw the roadblock. He whipped the car around, sped back down the road, turned right, found another back road and turned into it. He found another roadblock. Again he

whipped the car around and raced back toward the highway. It was the same wherever he went.

"The highway!" he gasped. "Have your gun ready!"

They were nearing the ambush. Hamer spied the approach of the speeding car. "Here they come. Get ready."

As if by instinct, Bonnie sensed the ambush. She shouted to Clyde to turn back but he wouldn't do it. "It's our only chance. We're in the clear. We're gonna make it!"

"No! No!" Bonnie shouted.

The last "No" seemed to hang in the air. There was a series of deafening roars as seven machine guns exploded with deadly accuracy and riddled the windshield, the motor, and the body of the car.

The slugs came so fast and in such volume that Clyde was dead while the car was still under his control. His face was shot from his head and all that remained was bloody pulp, a hideous and unrecognizable mass of flesh.

Bonnie's body bounced as the

slugs tore into her body. Even after she was dead, the slugs tore into her slim form and twisted it, turned it, heaved it, the while her blood ran from her.

The car jumped into the ditch about twenty feet from the ambushed cops, and as they ran toward it they kept on firing until there wasn't a square inch of metal that didn't have a hole in it. When they got to the car they found Clyde Barrow lying on his side, a lifeless thing from which blood still flowed, a faceless form that had no eyes.

Bonnie Parker was lying half out of the car, her body riddled with about fifty slugs, the face miraculously untouched, twisted into a pained and shocked expression, one arm dripping blood as it lay limply over the fender.

Frank Hamer looked at the two forms and shook his head.

"They never learn," he said in a low tone. "You just can't tell them a thing." He sighed. "Well, the show's over. Let's call the wagon."

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ONE MURDER, COMING UP!

by CARROLL MAYERS

Alone in the night a man was digging in his garden. No one knew why. But my nosy girl friend had a good idea . . .



THAT MORNING, before Sheriff Wexler left on a trip downstate to possibly identify a motel thief the authorities were holding as the same character we'd run into a

spell back, he stuck his head in the office.

"I'll check with you by phone, Pete. Keep the peace."

I grinned at him. "Yessir," I said. "You know me."

I'd been Wexler's single deputy for some four years and we had a comfortable relationship.

The sheriff's smile grew a bit pained at my rejoinder. "That I do," he agreed. "I also know Jenny Mills."

The young lady in question was the perkier redheaded waitress ever to flatter a uniform at the Blue Jay Cafe. She was also destined to be the future Mrs. Pete Rossi—I hoped—once I got my financial affairs squared away.

The only trouble was, Jenny had one of the liveliest imaginations in town, and where I was concerned, being associated with law enforcement and kindred activities, that imagination was wont to really take off. We had little hard crime in Surf City; a Saturday night fight or two, maybe a petty motel thief, as I've mentioned.

Once in awhile, though, something truly suspect would pop up, and if Jenny got wind of it—watch out. She wasn't naive, far from it. She'd simply get carried away.

There was, for instance, the time she had me checking on a patron at the cafe she'd "recognized" as an international confidence man from a flyer which came into the office, only to have the man turn

out to be a respectable luggage salesman. Another time, a larcenous trio she'd half overheard discussing plans to tunnel into the local bank had proved to be a contracting team finalizing the foundation excavating for a drive-in annex.

I winced at the sheriff's inference. "You don't have to worry about Jenny—"

He shook his head. "I'm thinking about us," he said.

I said soberly, "I understand, sir. I'll be careful."

Wexler nodded. "Good; I'll likely sleep better."

After the sheriff departed, I spent the rest of the morning on some paper work, then went over to the Blue Jay for lunch.

Jenny was pleasant enough as she brought me my usual cheese-on-rye and coffee, but watching her bustling about serving the other regulars, it struck me she lacked a shade of her customary perkiness. I caught her eye as some of the rush subsided. "Something wrong?"

She built a small smile. "Not especially," she said. "I had a nagging headache all last night, couldn't sleep."

"Oh? I'm sorry."

"—and then something came up—" Jenny broke off, avoiding my gaze.

Intuition nudged me; I said quietly, "You haven't been playing detective again?"

Her blue eyes grew wide and ingenuous. "Oh, no!"

Which meant she had.

I said, "Honey, I've told you a hundred times—"

"But I haven't, Pete. Honestly. It's just—" Jenny stopped again as a blue-plate special signaled her. "I'll tell you tonight," she finished hastily, "on the way to the movie."

Usually, with Jenny snuggled close and her jasmine perfume tickling my nostrils, I didn't care what the feature was on our regular Wednesday night jaunt to the drive-in, but I'd been particularly anticipating the James Bond thriller scheduled for tonight. A dedicated lawman can always pick up additional pointers, you understand. Now, though, it appeared my concentration on Bond's feminine vis-a-vis would be impaired. Unless I squelched the distraction first.

I broached the subject as we started out.

"What was that mystery bit this noon all about?" I asked Jenny.

She shook her head. "It's not exactly a mystery. It's—well, funny."

"Funny?"

"Odd. It didn't make any sense. I kept thinking about it all night."

I sighed resignedly. "Let's hear it," I said.

Jenny was quite serious. I know what you're thinking, Pete," she told me. This time I'm not intimating anything. Only—"

She drew a breath, went ahead. "That headache wouldn't let me sleep. I'd taken a couple of aspirin around eleven o'clock, but at three I got up to take another. I just happened to glance out the window—"

Jenny paused, then said shortly, "Roger Nickerson was digging in his rose garden."

I knew the couple. Roger and Mona Nickerson—a woman I understood to be considerably older than he—had settled in town some six months ago, taking the cottage adjacent to the one owned by Jenny and her widowed mother. Whatever their original affection, it had soon become evident that their present marital status could hardly be termed blissful.

Their constant bickering, even in public, was soon common knowledge. Our office had yet to be called in to keep the peace, but such a summons at any time would not have surprised me.

I prodded Jenny when she didn't continue. "And?"

She said, "That's all."

I frowned. "You mean, that's all that's bugging you?"

Jenny laid a hand on my arm: "You don't understand, Pete. It was three o'clock. Why would a man be digging up his garden at three o'clock in the morning?"

"I don't know."

"Doesn't it make you wonder?" she asked.

I said, "Maybe it does, some. But

I'm not going to lose any sleep over it."

Jenny wasn't rebuffed. "He could have been hiding something," she went on. "Something mysterious. Something he didn't want to risk his wife unearthing in the house—"

She stopped, aware she'd characteristically lapsed into the vein I'd preached against.

"I'm sorry," she said simply, "but it *could* be something like that—"

Why spoil a nice evening arguing?

"Sure it could," I conceded, swinging into the drive-in lane, "but what a man does on his own property is none of our concern."

"I understand."

"Especially considering he wasn't disturbing anybody."

"Of course." Jenny relaxed, leaned her head on my shoulder. "Even if it was three o'clock in the morning."

The little minx! She was trying to plant a seed, but I was darned if I'd let her. I concentrated on the movie—the gals that Bond meets are sure something, aren't they?—and didn't mention Nickerson the rest of the night. By mid-morning the next day I'd forgotten the whole thing. When Sheriff Wexler phoned as he'd said he would, I told him everything was under control.

It developed the sheriff's trip had proved a washout.

"I'll stay overnight, make it back tomorrow," Wexler informed me.

At noon, seeing Jenny again at the Blue Jay, the oddity she'd cited once more crossed my mind, but when she made no further reference, I didn't either. Instead, I proposed an evening's drive to Lookout Point, where we could park. Jenny promptly agreed.

I should have been suspicious of her ready acceptance. Because we'd no sooner parked when Jenny stiffened, stayed my devastating embrace. "Not right away, Pete. We've got to talk some more."

"Oh, no."

"Yes. I know I've been wrong before. But this is different. I've been thinking, really thinking!"

I regarded her without enthusiasm. "About Roger Nickerson, I presume."

"Yes! What do you really know about the man?"

"Not much," I admitted. "What do you?"

"For one thing," Jenny said, "I happen to know he's a traveling representative for a pharmaceutical concern. For another," and her blue eyes sparkled, "the Nickerson cat seems to have disappeared."

I blinked. "Cat?"

"Exactly," Jenny said. "I think Roger Nickerson poisoned that cat. And I think that's what he was burying when I happened to spy him!"

My breathing was becoming labored. Jenny, though, showed no recognition of my physical failings.

"In his business," she rushed on,

"Nickerson would have little trouble obtaining one of those potent drugs or poisons. I stopped by the library after work, checked. Some of them, such as a combination of hydrogen cyanide and morphine, simulate paralysis or apoplexy and they cancel out in the viscera, leave practically no trace."

I was still far out in left field. Jenny all but shook me in her agitation.

"Don't you understand?" she pressed. "That's what that cat business was: a dry run. He wanted to check how the poison would react."

The scoreboard lighted up a bit.

"And Nickerson's wife is next?" I ventured.

"Exactly!" Jenny repeated. "They're always bickering. Now Nickerson's decided to get rid of her. I asked some of the merchants. Mona Nickerson is away for a day or so, visiting her mother. Sometime soon, after she gets back, she'll apparently have a fatal apoplexy attack. I'm sure of it!"

Wild? Amen. But as I warned you, Jenny's imagination could really take flight when she stoked it up.

I inhaled deeply. "Maybe you're wrong about Nickerson's schedule," I suggested. "Maybe he's already poisoned her, buried her body in the garden as you oversaw, and will claim she deserted him."

Jenny shook her head soberly. "No, that wasn't any big grave—"

She broke off, my sarcasm regis-



tering. "You think I'm being ridiculous!"

"You said that."

"But it could be, Pete. You know it could!"

I sighed again. "I don't know anything of the sort," I told her. "Furthermore, I don't even want to discuss it."

"You're not going to do anything?"

"What in heck can I do? The whole thing's crazy." I tried to mollify her. "Forget the Nickersons, hon. If their cat died and he chose to bury it an ungodly hour, that's his business. Let's talk about something else."

I tried that devastating embrace again. "Better yet, let's not talk at all."

Jenny pouted but finally yielded. At that, the rest of the evening hardly could be termed pleasant. Strained is the word, I guess.

Sheriff Wexler returned the following afternoon, filled me in with a few details of his trip. The man held by the downstate authorities, suspected of rifling a bond salesman's motel room, hadn't been our

motel thief. With no specific evidence against him, the man had been released.

"Too bad," I said, in sober truth thinking more of just how much the sum the sheriff had cited as missing, forty thousand dollars, would have meant toward my marital aspirations with Jenny.

The sheriff shrugged. "One of those things," he said. "Nothing special here?"

I might have mentioned Jenny's suspicion of the imminent demise of Mrs. Roger Nickerson, but I thought it wiser not to disturb Wexler's metabolism.

"All calm and peaceful," I said.

And so it was, for another week. Then that tranquility was abruptly shattered one afternoon when Jenny stormed breathlessly into the office.

"Now maybe you'll believe me, Pete Rossi!" she declared, ignoring Sheriff Wexler.

"Eh?"

"Mona Nickerson has just suffered a paralytic attack; they've taken her to Mercy Hospital in an ambulance!"

I could only gape at her. Jenny, however distraught, could not resist echoing her conviction.

"I told you so!" she threw at me.

The sheriff took a hand. "What is all this?"

I managed a weak smile. "It's this way, sir—"

Jenny sniffed. "Never mind; I'll tell him."

And tell Wexler she did, in complete detail.

Halfway through the recital, the sheriff sighed, closed his eyes, but he heard Jenny out. Then he gave me a resigned look, said, "Get over to the hospital, check with the doctors."

To Jenny, Wexler added pointedly, "As for you, young lady, may I suggest you return to work?"

Jenny sniffed again, flounced out of the office without another glance at either of us. For my part, I wasn't up to trading looks with Wexler myself.

Once at Mercy, though, I pulled myself together. Despite his obvious misgivings, I knew the sheriff would require an exhaustive report, expert medical opinion. I spent some two hours waiting, questioning, but finally I got what I wanted.

"The doctors are satisfied it was a natural seizure," I reported to Wexler, "with no trace of any simulating poison. The woman is in critical condition but should make it." I hesitated, added, "I'm sorry about Jenny. She gets carried away sometimes—"

The sheriff grunted, eyed me bleakly. "She sure does." He shoved himself erect. "However, this time, considering what we know and a notion I got myself—plus a phone call I just made—she may have something. Come along."

"Huh?"

"To have us a little chat with friend Nickerson. I expect we ought

to first get a warrant from Judge Halsey, but maybe we can bluff our way without one.

The "cat" we dug up in Roger Nickerson's rose garden was an oilskin-wrapped package of forty thousand dollars' worth of negotiable securities.

The man first tried to deny his guilt, but when Wexler broached his own notion and backed it up with the phone confirmation he'd received of Nickerson's registration at the downstate motel the night of the theft, the philandering pharmaceutical representative finally capitulated.

I say philandering because that was the nub of the whole caper: Nickerson had a young chippie on the fire in a neighboring state, was only marking time for the opportunity and financial wherewithal to shuck his nagging wife, decamp permanently with her. When he chanced to learn a fellow registrant

at the motel was a bond salesman, Nickerson prowled his room, hit a bonanza, then brought the loot home, hid it where carping Mona wouldn't find it, and was waiting a favorable time to light out for good.

So that solved the dry-run murder mystery. Of course, our office can't claim any share of the reward the insurance company offered for recovery of the securities, but Jenny likely can, and Wexler has put in an oar for her. Should she collect, there would no longer be any financial barrier to our own nuptials.

There's just one thing. The closer that day appears, the more I'm beginning to have second thoughts. I mean, Jenny's perky and sweet, a living doll, but she does have that crazy imagination and I don't know if I'm quite up to a detective bride.

Confidentially, what would you do?

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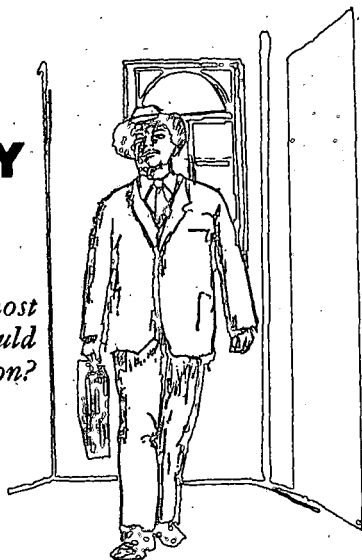
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By **BILL PRONZINI**

MR. WONG MEETS A LOVELY SPY

She was most charming, most talented—most deadly. Could Mei Wong find out the reason?

by DAN ROSS



MEI WONG, the internationally known Bombay art dealer, was looking out the window of his fifth floor studio in the great Indian city's Empire Hotel watching a majestic white P. & O. liner as it steamed across the bay. He was so absorbed by the sight he did not hear his friend, Inspector Bannerjee of the Bombay Homicide Division, enter his treasure laden studio.

"Impressive sight," the ascetic, brown-skinned Inspector Bannerjee said casually. He wore a white linen suit and a turban.

Mr. Wong turned to him. "I did not hear you come in," the old Chinese observed.

Inspector Bannerjee smiled.

"Put it down to my long years of training. Entering a room soundlessly requires a special knack."

Mr. Wong nodded and waved to a chair with a pudgy hand. "Won't you sit down, Inspector? Is this an official or a social visit?"

The bearded inspector took the offered chair and waited for the pudgy art dealer to settle himself into his accustomed place behind the studio's broad mahogany desk.

Then Inspector Bannerjee leaned forward. "It's strictly official, Mr. Wong. And I think you are the only one in Bombay who can help me."

"Indeed?" Mr. Wong's broad face showed no expression.

"Absorbed as you are in your art dealings, you must nevertheless be aware of the tense international situation," the inspector said.

"I am only too painfully aware of it," Mei Wong said gravely. "For some years I have received few items of value from the China mainland. I have had to look to other sources for my stock." He indicated a glass-fronted display case on the wall near his desk which contained delicate, priceless items of jade, ivory and porcelain.

Inspector Bannerjee followed his glance. "I take it you had a good supply of antiques before things became tight in the Communist area."

"Fortunately, yes," the old dealer said.

"You will be interested to know that Bombay has become a center for spy operations," the inspector said. "And one of the ringleaders of the movement here is a charming young woman from your own country. A Chinese beauty by the name of Anna Lee."

Mei Wong showed mild astonishment. "Yes, I have met her! She claimed to be from Formosa. She is an artist. She paints very well."

"True," the inspector agreed. "She has done some excellent portraits. In fact many of the consular members of the foreign colony have gone to her studio for sittings. And we think she has systematically obtained information from some of them."

The art dealer said, "Then you

believe she is in the employ of the Communists?"

"We know it, but we can't prove it yet," Inspector Bannerjee said. "She bought several items from you, did she not?"

"She did. On one occasion a bracelet of gold and jade. And not too long ago a locket with a worked gold chain and a jade main piece. Yes, both were extremely expensive items."

Inspector Bannerjee sighed and sat back in his chair. "Not the sort of things a struggling artist could afford, eh?"

"That is true."

"Miss Anna Lee has an excellent gimmick," the inspector explained. "It seems her people have developed a tiny transmitting device which she uses to deliver the conversations between her and the subjects of her portraits. We think that you are indirectly involved with the device."

Mei Wong spread his delicate hands. "But I know nothing of electronics!"

Inspector Bannerjee laughed. "I realize that, Mr. Wong. What I'm trying to tell you is our agents suspect she has the transmitting device cleverly installed in either the bracelet you sold her or the locket. They are both ornate and bulky and she invariably wears them when receiving members of the different consulates for their sittings at her studio."

Mr. Wong raised his eyebrows.



"It could be possible, but I doubt it."

"We are reasonably sure we're on the right track," the dark-skinned inspector said. "Which do you think might offer the better hiding place for the device?"

Mei Wong considered, "Probably the locket. It had a space that could be used for such a purpose. By slightly changing the design of the bracelet it could be utilized to cover a sufficiently small device."

"Would you mind setting up an appointment with Miss Lee to have your portrait done?" Inspector Bannerjee asked.

The old man looked startled. "I really am not interested."

"I realize that," Inspector Bannerjee said. "But I want you to have a look at both the locket and the bracelet. Examine them closely, if you can, on the pretense of checking them for some purpose or other. You should be able to tell which has the transmitter hidden in it without exciting her suspicion. You could pretend to be merely admiring your wares. Later on you can

let us know which item you suspect."

"I will make an attempt if you like," Mei Wong said. "But I cannot promise to solve your mystery."

So it was that two days later Mr. Wong arrived at the luxurious apartment of Miss Anna Lee for the first of several sittings for his portrait. The gracious Chinese girl had been most obliging and worked him into her schedule, although she admitted to being very busy.

Mei Wong arrived in one of his immaculate white linen suits and wearing his usual Panama hat. He sat nervously in the plain chair of the big studio while the petite and lovely Anna Lee studied him from her stand before the blank canvas that was to bear his likeness.

Anna Lee smiled at him. "I am flattered that you have decided to let me do a study of you."

"Your fame has spread so quickly," Mei Wong said. "I believe you have done the British Consul, along with some of the city's most prominent business men and several of the United States Consular officers."

The slim Chinese beauty nodded. "Yes. Many of the foreign colony have come to me."

Mr. Wong sat perspiring freely as Anna Lee went slowly about her work. During most of the time she smoked, daintily holding a long cigarette holder in one hand and sketching with the other. Several

times she came close to Mei Wong to pose him.

During one of these moments he seized the opportunity to study closely both the bracelet and locket which she was wearing. He eyed her questioningly as he asked, "Is it not rather foolish to wear such valuables at your work?"

She laughed lightly. "No. It makes me appear more exotic to my subjects. Wearing these pieces is good advertising."

Mei Wong had other thoughts on the matter but he did not argue with the beautiful spy. Inspector Bannerjee had arranged to meet him at the studio and drive him back to his hotel. He was glad when he finally heard the doorbell apartment ring.

"That will be my friend to pick me up and drive me home," he said.

"Of course," Anna Lee smiled at him and putting down her crayon went to answer the door. A few minutes later she returned with Inspector Bannerjee following her and a rather puzzled expression on her pretty oriental face.

"I did not know the inspector was your close friend," she said warily.

Mei Wong smiled. "We have been the best of friends for some years," he assured her.

Inspector Bannerjee nodded. "Mr. Wong and I have many similar interests," he said.

"Indeed?" Anna Lee said. She

puffed at the cigarette in the long holder in a nervous fashion and at the same time seemed to involuntarily lift a hand to her locket.

Mei Wong gave the inspector a knowing glance. "I believe I can be of some help," he said.

The inspector nodded, his eyes on the locket. "I think I follow you," he agreed.

Anna Lee looked puzzled and exhaled clouds of smoke as she stood between the two men. She seemed ready to bolt from the room at any second.

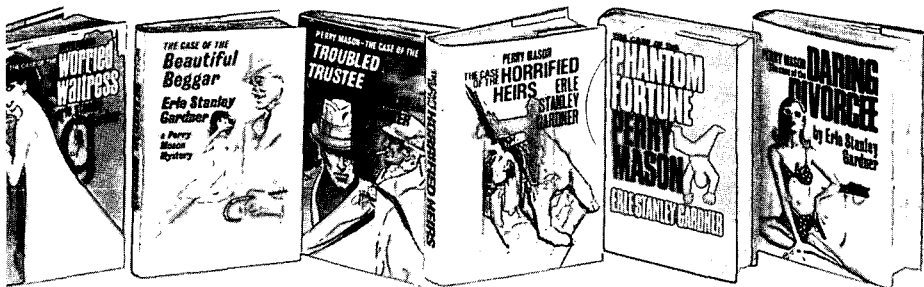
"I doubt if you do," Mei Wong said gently. "Since I think it will be Miss Lee's cigarette holder that will interest you most."

Inspector Bannerjee snatched the girl's wrist before she could get out of the room and then struggled with her to retrieve the cigarette holder. When he had it in his own hands he unscrewed it to reveal the tiny transmitter.

Meanwhile the oriental girl watched with sullen face and blazing, angry eyes.

"How did you know?" the inspector asked Mei Wong.

The old man sighed. "It was simple. She wore the locket and bracelet to misdirect you. When she came close I noticed the heavy nicotine stains on her fingers. It became obvious to me that she ordinarily did not use a cigarette holder. Hence she must be using it for a special reason when painting: to conceal the transmitter."



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